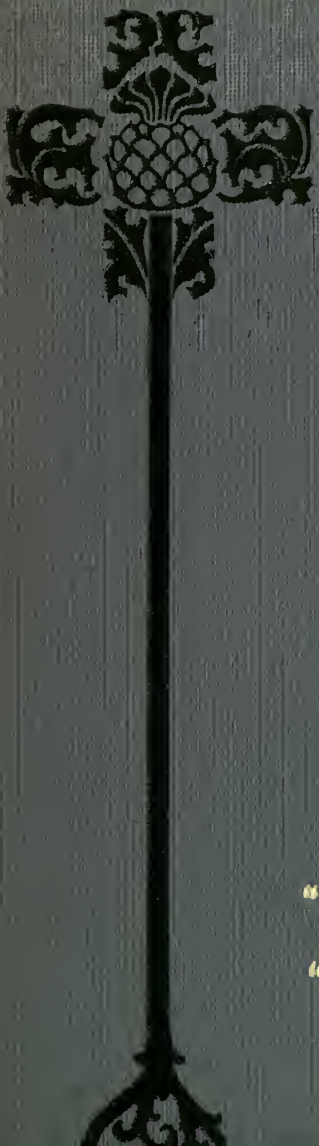
The MISADVENTURES of JOSEPH

by

J. J. BELL



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By J. J. BELL

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And now the rain came down in earnest (see page 33)

The
Misadventures of Joseph

BY

J. J. BELL

AUTHOR OF

"Oh! Christina!" "Whither Thou Goest," "Wee Macgreegor," "Wullie McWattie's Master," etc.

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I

NAMESAKES

MR. JOSEPH REDHORN, the Fairport painter, paper-hanger and decorator, as he was given to styling himself, was never in the best of humours when roused from a Saturday afternoon nap; and on this occasion his irritation was not lessened by the discovery of Mr. John McNab, the reputed oldest inhabitant, on the doorstep of his bachelor abode. So far as Joseph's experience went, a visit from Mr. McNab meant little more than a dreary dissertation on the latter's great age and a notable shrinkage in the former's stock of ginger-wine.

Nevertheless, the painter's invitation to enter, though interrupted by a yawn, was not inhospitable. "I hope ye're weel, John," he said, guiding the old man to the shabby, comfortable easy chair.

"Fine." The reply was delivered with unwonted briskness. Mr. McNab seated himself, looked about him, grinned and rubbed his hands.

"I'm no' gaun to bide a meenute, Joseph. I merely drapped in to bid ye come an' ha'e yer supper wi' us the nicht."

"Aw!" exclaimed Mr. Redhorn, who was more used to entertaining than to being entertained. He stroked his long nose and blinked doubtingly at his visitor.

"I'm no' jokin'," said Mr. McNab. "The auld wife has made a pie, an' I've got a gran' surprise for ye!"

"Weel, I'm sure it's excessively kind o' ye," the painter said, recovering confidence in himself and humanity generally. "If ye'll wait for three meenutes, I'll gi'e masel' a bit tosh up. Fortunately, I pit on a clean sark, etceetera, afore I had ma dinner the day." He went over to the sink. "I'll jist get rid o' the dews o' kindly sleep, as it were, an' then—"

"Phoo!" exclaimed Mr. McNab, "it's terrible warm the day!" He cast a wistful glance in the direction of a certain cupboard.

"It is that," agreed Joseph, turning on the tap. "It's no' the weather for ginger-wine, or I wud—"

"There's a chill in the heat, too," said Mr. McNab. "If ye was as auld as me—"

"Wud ye try a taste o' ginger-wine, John?"

"Oh, weel, I'm no parteec'lar; but I'll tak' a

taste—for comp'ny's sake. I'll wait till ye've feenished washin' yer face."

"I'll no' be a jiffy."

"Dinna hurry yersel' for me," Mr. McNab said condescendingly, and quite unconsciously smacked his lips. "Ye'll be wonderin' what that gran' surprise is," he remarked presently.

"'Deed, ay," returned Joseph, who was much afraid it would be something to eat in addition to the pie. "But I'm curbin' ma' curiosity."

Mr. McNab gave a hoarse but happy chuckle. "Ma gran'son Peter an' his wife arrived the day," he announced. "Likewise their offspring."

"D'ye tell me that?" said Mr. Redhorn, from behind a towel. "Is the offspring numerous?" he inquired in a tone of well-feigned interest.

"Na, na. It's their first." Another chuckle.

"A singular offspring!" commented the painter, polishing his bald forehead. Then, suddenly, he dropped the towel. "Criftens!" he cried, striding across the room and grasping the other's hand, "So ye're a *great* gran'fayther!"

"But that's no' the gran' surprise," said the old man a little later, as he sipped, with grateful sounds, the ginger-wine which his host had made haste to set before him. "I've aye wanted to dae ye a guid turn, Joseph, for ye've been rael kind to the auld wife an' me—"

"Whisht, man!" The painter picked up and reapplied the towel.

"Weel, I'll no' say ony mair aboot it the noo." Mr. McNab laid down his empty glass with a thump. "I'll spare yer blushes."

"Help yersel', John."

"Thenk ye."

An hour passed ere Mr. McNab, who had become more than usually garrulous, declared himself ready for the road. "We maunna forget the pie," he remarked gaily.

"We maunna forget the pie," Joseph solemnly echoed, and, going to the mantel-piece, helped himself to a draught from a bottle labelled "Dyspepsia Elixir," observing, not for the first time, that prevention was better than cure.

Then, taking the old man's arm, he conducted him, puffing cheerfully, homewards.

The necessary introductions were in the little garden in front of the cottage.

"This is ma gran'son Peter," said Mr. McNab to Joseph. "Ye'll mind his faythe r."

Mr. Redhorn nodded and shook hands with the smiling young man.

"An' this is Peter's wife, Jessie."

Mr. Redhorn blushed, touched his bowler hat, and gently clasped the fingers of the pale, pretty

girl who sat on the old green bench with a shawl-covered bundle in her arms.

"An' this—" The old man put out trembling fingers and withdrew them. "I'm feart I'll hurt it, Jessie. *You* draw back the shawl." When she had done so—"An' this," he said, with a soft chuckle, "is ma *great*-gran'son!"

Much embarrassed, Mr. Redhorn peered into the tiny, slumbering face.

"A bonny wee lad, is he no'?" murmured the great-grandmother, approaching softly.

"Ay, ay," said Joseph, helplessly. Then feeling it incumbent upon him to make some intelligent remark, he added: "It'll be forty year since I was as close to an infant."

Mr. McNab created a welcome diversion.

"And noo for the gran' surprise!" he cried. "Joseph, what dae ye think we're for namin' ma great-gran'son?"

"Whisht, man!" said old Mrs. McNab; "ye maun ask Maister Ridhorn's leave first."

"Tits, wife! Ye dinna need to ask leave to pay a man a compliment." He dug the painter in the ribs. "Ma great-gran'son's name is to be *Joseph*—efter yer noble sel'!"

Mr. Redhorn gasped. "*Me!*" he cried in dire confusion, as red as a turkey-cock. But when the young couple modestly begged his permission, his confusion became merged in gratification,

and by supper-time he was swelling somewhat with pride, though, having drunk the infant's health in tea, he modestly expressed the hope that he might live to be worthy of his namesake.

On the way home he encountered his apprentice, Willie McWattie.

"Wullie," he said, after explaining matters, "if it wasna for thon pie and the corn on ma wee toe, I wud feel like as if I was treadin' on air! Remember me to raise yer wages a shillin' next Seturday."

Four days later he called at the cottage.

"I believe it's a custom—an' an excellent custom it is," he stammered—"for a party in ma prood poseetion to—to—" Here he broke down so far as speech was concerned, and presented the young mother, on her offspring's behalf, with a silver mug bearing the inscription: "Joseph John McNab, 14th July, 1912 A.D. (to the silversmith he had insisted on the "A.D.") from his well-wisher, J. R."

* * * * *

About three weeks after the christening, Mr. Redhorn fell into a depressed state. Such a condition was not infrequently his, and as a rule he attributed it to the fact of Providence's hav-

ing seen fit to supply him with "interior organs o' inferior quality." Now, however, a combination of circumstances by no means supernatural were to be held accountable. Within the space of a few hours he had been worsted in a philosophical argument with his old enemy, Danks the fishmonger; he had received news which meant a "bad debt" of several pounds; a lady had flatly refused to permit him to decorate her hall and staircase with a stencil pattern of his own invention which he proudly designated, "The Redhorn Conventional Comet"; a consignment of linseed oil, urgently needed, had not come to hand; and Willie, the apprentice, had departed on a fortnight's holiday. Further, the old McNabs had gone on a visit to friends in the city.

Mr. Redhorn, engaged in applying green paint to a summer-house in the grounds of the laird, smote a fly on his nose, and came to the conclusion that he was, among other dismal things, a "shupremely shuperfluous indiveedual," which, being interpreted, meant simply that he was feeling lonesome.

Thus it came to pass that he welcomed the greeting of Jamie Caldwell, a gardener on the estate, and a person with whom he had hitherto enjoyed little more than a nodding acquaintance.

"Warm," said Jamie, briefly but pleasantly, halting as though to light his pipe.

"Ay, it's warm," said Joseph, "and the flies is something atrocious."

"Ay, they're bad the day—A' the same, I wish I had your job, Ridhorn."

"Dae ye?" said the painter dryly. "What's wrang with the gardenin'?"

"In ma opeenion," the gardener remarked, not without hesitation, "the pentin's what ye might ca' a noble trade."

Mr. Redhorn methodically laid his brush across the rim of the paint-pot, folded his arms, and faced the speaker.

"Caldwell," he said warmly, "I didna ken there was a man in Fairport wi' sich a lofty mind. Though it has been prostituted by obscene characters that ha'e caused it to stink in the estimation of the public through their gross unpunctuality, slovenliness, trickery, etceetera—the pentin' trade is, as ye observe, a noble trade—or profession—and I'm prood to be its devotee. An' I'm obleeged to ye for yer inspirin' words o' appreciation—Dash the flies!"

It must be confessed that Mr. Caldwell was somewhat taken aback by the unexpected torrent of eloquence, the source of which he had unwittingly tapped. Recovering his wits, he spat gracefully upon a calceolaria, and said: "It's you

for the speechifyin'! Ye should be in the Hoose o' Commons, Ridhorn. By gum! ye would mak' the sleepy-heids sit up."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "Ma verbosity got the better o' me the noo," he said modestly. "Still, I couldna but be gratified at yer remark, espaycially comin' frae a beautifier o' the universe like yersel'."

"Oh, we're a' daein' oor best in that line, I hope," Mr. Caldwell returned carelessly. "But I suppose ye prefer something fancier nor a summer-house to pent. This doesna gi'e ye a chance for to show yer skill."

"True," replied the painter, flicking an insect from his ear; "but we've got to tak' the rough wi' the fine, the plain wi' the elaborate, etceetera."

There was a pause, during which the gardener's eyes roved the neighbourhood as though in search of further inspiration.

"The ither day I heard yer 'Conventional Comets' spoken highly o'," he said at last.

"Did ye that?" Mr. Redhorn looked pleased. "Wha was the appreciator o' ma modest creation?"

"I canna mind, but I heard it sure enough. And that reminds me, I was gaun to tell ye, Ridhorn, that the greenhooses up thonder are due a coat o' pent, and I was thinkin' I wud gi'e a

hint to Sir Archibald to let *you* ha'e the job—that is, if ye're wantin' it."

"Man," cried Joseph, "that's exceedin' kind o' ye. I'll be glad to ha'e the job, for the prospec's o' trade in Fairport are no' brilliant at the moment. Thenk ye, thenk ye!"

"Dinna mention it." Mr. Caldwell looked at his watch. "Gor! it's five o'clock! Ye'll be stoppin' sune—eh? Ye best come up and tak' ye tea wi' us the nicht. Ye ken the cottage?"

"Aw, but—"

"Ye dinna *need* to gang hame for yer tea?"

"Na—I'm a bachelor, ye ken—but yer kindness—"

"Ye'll be welcome. I'll expec' ye at the back o' six," said Mr. Caldwell.

He left the painter glowing with more than the warmth of the sun.

Mr. Redhorn enjoyed his tea that night. He found Mr. Caldwell a genial host, and made the acquaintance of his five children, who behaved with wondrous decorum and treated the guest with the utmost respect. He made the acquaintance, also, of a "fine boy" just three days old. . . .

* * * * *

On a black and stormy night, in November,

Mr. Redhorn rang—after several feebly-futile attempts—the bell of one of the larger houses in Fairport, and, the door being opened, inquired in a faltering voice—

"Is the doctor in?"

The new housekeeper—Joseph was thankful she was a stranger—led the way to the consulting room.

"Take a seat, please. What is the name?" she said.

"Ridhorn, the penter."

"I don't think he'll keep you waiting long," she said, sympathetically, encouragingly, judging from voice and countenance that the patient was in considerable agony.

Mr. Redhorn seated himself on the corner of a chair, sniffed the iodoform-laden atmosphere, and groaned softly.

"This room has beheld a heap o' sufferin'," he reflected, his gaze on the crimson easy chair wherein the inhabitants of Fairport reclined when parting with their teeth. "Oh, I wish I hadna come," he was saying to himself when Dr. McLeod appeared.

"Well, Mr. Redhorn, this is a wild night. What can I do for you?"

"Ay, it's a wild nicht—I cam' to—to consult ye—" Joseph stuck fast.

"The old trouble?"

Joseph shook his head.

"Don't be afraid, man." The doctor smiled encouragingly. "Tooth bothering you?"

"Na; it's no' exac'ly a tooth, doctor," the painter forced himself to reply. "It's sharper than a serpent's tooth—"

The doctor seated himself in the crimson chair and leaned over and took Joseph's wrist. "Let me see your tongue."

Joseph meekly protruded the member mentioned.

"Been sticking to plain food?"

"I—I confess I had a bit o' sawmon for a treat the week afore last."

"H'm!"

"I had ma apprentice to his tea that nicht. In confidence, doctor, he ett the majority o' the tin. But he was at his wark the next day."

"H'm!" said the doctor again, and released the patient's wrist. "Tongue's all right and pulse isn't bad. Tell me what you feel wrong with you."

"Naething."

"Nothing?"

"Jist that, doctor."

"Then—then what do you want me to do for you?"

"I—I was wantin'"—Joseph produced his

handkerchief and applied it to his forehead—"I was wantin' to consult ye."

"About what?"

"Heaven help me!" murmured the painter, "hoo am I to divulge the query?"

"Don't be afraid," the doctor once more said. "Anything you say here, short of a confession of murder, is sacred. I'm used to keeping secrets."

"Ye'll be as secret as the tomb?"

"As secret as the tomb," replied Dr. McLeod, solemnly, though his mouth twitched at the corners.

Mr. Redhorn took a furtive survey of the apartment. "Could onybody hear me speakin' in here?"

"Keep your mind easy on that score." The doctor rose. "But I'll lock the door." He did so, and came back to his seat. "Now, what's the trouble, my friend?"

Joseph moistened his lips and performed the act of swallowing several times. Then—"Is yer charge the same, whatever I consult ye aboot?"

"Oh, don't bother yourself about my charge. That will be all right—Yes, yes; my charge is the same for all consultations."

"It's no' that I wud grudge ye yer charge, doctor," said Joseph. "In fact I'll be real willin'

to pay ye onything in reason if ye can tell me—" He stuck fast again.

"Tell you what, Redhorn?"

"Oh, this is terrible! . . . Aw, doctor, I canna say it. I best get awa' hame. I'm sorry for disturbin' ye. I—"

"Look here," said the doctor, reaching over to a small table for a pad and pencil; "if you can't say it, perhaps you can write it down."

"I'll try," said Joseph after a long hesitation. I'll try—if ye'll no' look at me."

"I'll leave you alone for five minutes," the doctor said kindly, and with an encouraging smile went out.

Mr. Redhorn, groaning, was presently in the throes of composition.

The doctor returned, read what Joseph had written, went scarlet with suppressed emotion, and then exploded.

"I was feart ye would think it funny," said Joseph ruefully, preparing to depart.

But the other patted him on the shoulder and bade him sit down again.

* * * * *

On the following evening Mr. Redhorn and his apprentice were seated at the former's untidy,

cosy hearth. On a chair between them rested a draughtboard.

To all appearances Mr. Redhorn was under a spell of absence of mind. He lay back in his easy-chair, gazing vacantly yet fixedly at the cigarette of the worst possible quality which he held between his finger and thumb, and which had gone out some minutes ago. He breathed heavily through his long nose. A survivor of the summer fly legions disported itself in half-hearted fashion over his few remaining hairs.

"That was the third game to me," remarked the apprentice, who had just finished setting the "men" in their places. He had done this with the utmost method and determination in order to allow his host a reasonable time for self-communion. But surely that time was now exhausted.

Mr. Redhorn paid no attention to the remark.

Willie waited for about thirty seconds. Then —"Maister Ridhorn, I'm sayin' it was the third game to me."

"Oh, was it?" the painter stirred with a sigh. "Weel, I'm sure ye're welcome, laddie."

"Ye're playin' shockin' bad the nicht," said Willie.

"Ah, I dare say."

"What's wrang wi' ye? Is it yer dyspeepsia again?"

There was no answer. The apprentice began to despair of getting another game before the hour for home-going, and Mr. Redhorn had evidently forgotten the customary eight o'clock refreshment in the shape of a bottle of lemonade."

Suddenly the host sat up. "Wullie," he said slowly, "wud ye say I was lackin' in moral courage, or merely in common sense?"

"Are ye thinkin' aboot the toasted cheese ye had for tea?"

"Na, na!"

Willie considered. "Are ye thinkin' aboot the silver mugs, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Ay. . . . Which am I lackin' in—moral courage, or—"

"Both," said Willie. "Are ye no' for anither game?"

Mr. Redhorn grunted. "But hoo, I ask ye, could I refuse to let Jamie Caldwell an' Tammas Broon an' Sam McLeod name their sons "Joseph' efter masel'? I repeat, hoo could I refuse?"

"Ye didn't need to refuse—I'll play ye a man short this time, jist to gi'e ye a chance—but ye didna need to gi'e a' the babies mugs."

"But I had gi'ed McNab's great-gran'son a mug."

"Ach, weel, ye shouldna ha'e been sae saft. Ye should ha'e stopped at Caldwell, onyway."

Mr. Redhorn sighed. "It's no' that I grudge the puir wee innocents their mugs, but . . . Aweel, I suppose I should be thenkfu' that the baby born in Fairport the ither day—Finlay Thomson's—was o' the female gender." He paused for a moment. "I consulted the doctor confedentially yesterday, an' it was encouragin' to hear that he had nae prognostications o' further juvenile arrivals afore the Spring. Maybe by that time the name 'Joseph' 'll be oot o' fashion. Of course the doctor couldna guarantee—"

"I've moved," said Willie, a trifle impatiently.

"Itherwise we'll ha'e to pray for a boom in the Fairport pentin' trade. . . . Aweel, we'll get back to oor game, laddie. I've nae richt to cast a gloom on ye. An' I confess I'm feelin' mair hopeful since—Criftens! there's somebody at the door. See wha it is. It's ower late for auld John McNab."

Entered Mr. and Mrs. Finlay Thomson. The latter, frail-looking, flushed, bearing a bundle of shawls which emitted faint squeaks.

Said Mr. Thomson, after his wife was seated: "It was a fine nicht, so we thought we wad bring ye a dizzen fresh eggs, likewise oor wee lassie to let ye see her." He laughed. "Ye see, Ridhorn, ye've got the reputation o' bein' a judge o' babies!"

Mr. Redhorn laughed also. He felt safe

enough this time, and though he was still shy of infants, he did not hesitate to draw near when Mrs. Thomson uncovered the little one's face.

"Vera satisfactory, vera satisfactory," he murmured, using the phrase that was in danger of becoming natural.

"If it had been a boy," said the father, bringing out his pipe, "we wud ha'e asked yer leave to call it *Joseph*."

"I'm sure," said Joseph cordially, "I wud ha'e been exceedin'ly gratified."

"Thenk ye," said Mr. Thomson. "In that case, and seein' it's a lassie, we'll name it—" He paused, smiling to his wife.

"Josephine," said Mrs. Thomson softly.

There was a crash. Willie had deliberately knocked over the draughtboard.

II

THE TREAT AND THE TREATMENT

ON a certain Saturday afternoon in March Mr. Redhorn was returning home from an afternoon-dinner walk, which he had undertaken more for the benefit of his body than for his own pleasure. As he occasionally explained to sympathizers, his "members were aye mair or less at war" among themselves. For example, if, as now, he sought pedestrian practice for digestion's sake, his corns immediately became "excruciatin'"; or did an unwonted peace in his pedal extremities suggest exercise, he was sure to be threatened with a shocking cold in the head. To-day Mr. Redhorn had not been sorry to curtail his walk, accepting the lowering aspect of the southern sky as a good and sufficient excuse for permitting a triumph of the flesh.

Thinking of his bachelor fireside, his ancient easy-chair, his carpet slippers, and a penny novelette, he was proceeding somewhat gingerly across a recently-mended patch of roadway,

when he narrowly escaped a fall over a small girl who had emerged from a cottage garden on his right. She was sobbing bitterly.

"Mercy!'" he ejaculated, recovering his balance, "did I hurt ye, lassie?"

She shook her flaxen head and continued to sob.

"What for are ye greetin'?" he kindly enquired.

"Ma mither skelpit me."

"Oh, indeed!" he murmured. "An—an' what for did she skelp ye?"

"For greetin'."

Mr. Redhorn softly scratched the back of his head. "I'm no' keen on interferin' in domestic affairs," he said slowly, and removed his hand from his head to his pocket, "but I believe I've a thrupp'ny-bit in ma purse—Oh, here's yer mither comin'!"

"Aw, Maister Ridhorn," cried the hot, tired-looking woman, as she came down to the gate, "dinna pet her, if ye please. She's been that bad the day, an' her brithers an' sisters ha'ena been muckle better. I didna mean for to hurt her. But ma man's in his bed wi' a twisted knee, an' his mither's busy turnin' the hoose upside doon, an' ma youngest is cuttin' a terrible tooth, an' I'm a week behind wi' ma washin', an'—weel, is it ony wonder if I whiles loss ma temper an' gi'e

a scud here an' there? What wi' seeven bairns, an' the auldest no' yet ten—"

"Say nae mair, Mistress Tosh. A' the sympathy I used to lavish on Job is hereby transferred to yersel'! I dinna wonder at ye lossin' yer temper in a sma' way, but I marvel at ye keepin' yer youth—"

"Hoots, Maister Ridhorn, I'm gettin' like an auld wife." Nevertheless, Mrs. Tosh looked a trifle less distracted, and began to tidy her hair in absent fashion.

"Noo, if ye've nae objections," said the painter, recovering from the effort involved in producing the compliment, and from the self-consciousness that had followed its utterance, "I'll tak' this wee lassie to the village an' see her buy a wheen sweeties."

Ere the pleased mother and the now beaming daughter could express themselves, a little chorus of wails arose from behind the hedge, and next moment five youngsters appeared at the gate.

"Are we no' gaun to get buyin' sweeties, too?" they cried, with one accord.

"Jessie'll gi'e ye some o' hers," Mrs. Tosh said hastily.

Whereupon the eldest daughter exclaimed, "I wudna trust her," while the youngest son piped,

"Want to buy wheeties for masel'." A childish babel ensued.

It must be confessed that the middle-aged bachelor was miserably embarrassed. With all his desire to be kind to children, he was utterly unfamiliar with them and their ways. A vision of himself entering the village with half-a-dozen "weans" in his charge made him feel warm. He stood blinking his pale blue eyes and stroking the bridge of his nose—sure sign of his feeling at a loss.

"*Please,* Maister Ridhorn!" said the eldest daughter, with an alluring look.

"Whisht, Mary!" sharply muttered the mother.

"*Please,* Maister Ridhorn!" cried all the other children excepting Jessie, who need not be condemned as greedy because her lip quivered. She had been promised a whole threepenny-bit, and now it was likely to dwindle to a ha'penny. Such a slump is ill to be borne by people older than Jessie; besides, even the older people prefer to handle their own—for a time, at least—before they give any of it away.

Surreptitiously she gave the painter's sleeve a timid tug.

That settled it. Mr. Redhorn pulled himself together—and his purse from his pocket. A general sigh went up as the small coin passed into Jessie's little hand. "It's hers to dae what she

likes wi'," he said; "but if the ithers like to come to the shop, they'll each get a pennyworth o' sweeties." A chorus of approval interrupted the speech. "Will ye let them come, Mistress Tosh? I—I'll see that they dinna meet wi' ony accident, an' it'll gi'e you ten meenutes breathin' space, as is were."

At first Mrs. Tosh protested; then she thanked the painter and gave her consent, with numerous admonitions to her offspring to "behave" themselves.

Let us slur over the progress to the village. The children discussed what sweets they would choose, but the painter, as anxious as a hen for the safety of her brood, said never a word. The youngest got tired, and demanded to be carried, and eventually the painter, who had never in his life held a child, picked him up awkwardly, and bore him along with nervous care, pulling faces unconsciously and perspiring profusely. All the way Jessie clutched his jacket with one hand, while with the other she warmed her precious piece of silver. Evidently she already regarded the giver no less than the gift as her especial property.

Mr. Redhorn entered the village with acute misgivings. The amusement of his neighbours and the curiosity of his neighbours' children were certainly trying to his sense of dignity.

"Is it a Sabbath schule treat or a circus?" the piermaster jocularly enquired, and Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, demanded of Heaven to declare why Redhorn had gone and got married on the sly. Some unfeeling humorist addressed him as "Paw," and goodness knows what he might have retorted had not the little boy in his arms incontinently embraced and kissed him, whereat a semi-ironical cheer went up.

But, somehow, the little boy had drawn the sting from it all. "Let them gas!" said Mr. Redhorn under his breath, and strode onward with his trotting "family" to the sweet shop.

Amid such a display of "goodies" the six children were loth to choose; none would "burst" his or her whole penny on one sort of sweet, and several insisted on making farthing purchases. Moreover, the old woman was as slow of movement as she was hard of hearing.

At the end of twenty minutes Mr. Redhorn found courage to remonstrate, and business proceeded in something like earnest. It was then that Mr. Redhorn, turning for the first time to the window, perceived that it was beginning to rain. Also he perceived that the shop was watched by a throng of children with solemn round eyes, envious, wistful.

"This," said the painter to himself, "is mair nor I expected in ma worst forebodin's."

At long last everybody in the shop was satisfied.

"Bide a meenute," commanded Mr. Redhorn, opening the door. The rain had thickened, but the "outsiders" were still there. He counted them—seventeen. He blinked at them, stroked his nose, and muttered "Criftens! I hadna bargained for this—an' it's no' even the New Year." Then—"In for a penny, etceetera," he said aloud, and took out his purse once more. To the old woman he gave money, to the "outsiders" a faltering intimation that they had merely to enter the shop in order to obtain a pennyworth of sweets each.

There was practically no demonstration until he and his band had left the shop, and then the yells went up and the rush began. Of the old woman it may be recorded how, an hour later, she devoutly thanked her Maker that the next day was the Sabbath.

And now the rain came down in earnest.

"This is awfu'!" cried Mr. Redhorn, picturing himself returning six dripping bairns to a wearied mother. "What's to be done? Whaur can we gang? We best try—"

Jessie gave his sleeve a little tug, not so timid as the first. "We could gang to *your* hoose," she said softly.

For a moment he hesitated, then threw up his

head and led the way, the youngest again in his arms. Let the neighbours laugh!

But in the untidy, dingy kitchen, which he called home, he once more stroked his nose. What on earth was to be done with "a' they weans?" He was beginning to feel desperate, when through the streaming window he caught sight of his apprentice, Willie McWattie, hurrying along, clad in oilskins. He got the sash up just in time.

"Wullie—here!"

"Hullo!" said Willie, returning. "My! ye've got comp'ny, Maister Ridhorn."

"Ay. . . . Wullie, are ye busy the noo?"

"There's a chap comin' to his tea at oor hoose. Was ye wantin' me for onything?"

The painter suppressed a sigh. "Na, na. . . . But, Wullie—eh—since ye'll be passin' Tosh's cottage, I wish ye wud tell Mistress Tosh that 'm keepin' her weans here to gi'e the rain a chance to stop. Tell her no' to be anxious. They're a' in the best of health, etceetera."

"I'll tell her. Is that a'?"

"Ay. Thenk ye, laddie. . . . Oh, bide a meenute! Eh—Wullie, what—what does a body dae wi' weans for to please them?"

"Gi'e them things to eat."

"What-like things?"

"Oh, sweeties an' pastries an' leemonade."

"I see. It's a wonder I didna think o' that. Weel, I happen to ha'e a fersh dizzen o' leemonade in the hoose, but ye can tell the baker to send me twa shillins' worth o' his best pastries—instanter."

"I'll dae that," said Wullie, receiving the money.

"Stop, Wullie! D'ye think twa shillin's' worth'll be ample?"

Willie surveyed the children. "Oh, ay," he replied, "there's nane o' them extra big. Is that a', Maister Ridhorn?"

"That's a', an' may Heaven reward ye."

As Mr. Redhorn turned from the window several young voices put the enquiry—

"Is the pastries for us?"

"Surely."

"An' the leemonade?"

"Jist that."

They regarded him in silent awe and admiration, until Jessie tugged his sleeve, and whispered, "Are ye no' for a sweety?"

"Criftens!" cried the painter, "I ha'ena ett a sweety for five-an'-thirty year!"

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Two hours—also all the pastries and most of the lemonade—had gone.

Mr. Redhorn lay back in his chair and

anxiously surveyed his young guests who were working their wills on his household possessions. The four girls were playing at "shops," with everything they had cared to lay hands on. The elder boy was enjoying a lump of putty as big as his head, and the younger, having lately removed the pendulum from the eight-day clock, was gazing fascinated at the venerable thing's crazy performance.

Mr. Redhorn was troubled; yet neither personal discomfort nor fear for his property was the cause of his anxiety. To gratify Jessie he had eaten half a penny pastry, and the result to himself had been so dire that he was now filled with forebodings as to what would happen to the small persons who had consumed three or four—possibly five—whole ones apiece, with unstinted washings-down of lemonade.

Through the window he could see the sinking sun breaking through the clouds, and he guessed that the weather would soon permit of homegoing. "I thought I had mair discreetion," he sadly reflected. "If they become martyrs to dyspeepsia like masel', what'll they think o' me? An' what'll their mither say? Oh, dear! I should ha'e kent better."

Just then Jessie made him one of her periodic visits. "Are ye no' for a sweety?"

"I couldna," he groaned, "as sure's death I

couldna. An' dinna eat ony mair yersel', like a guid lassie."

"I've ett them a' excep' this yin. I'll gi'e ye a kiss instead, if ye like."

Mr. Redhorn, after a hurried glance at the others, took the offering, blushing to the roots of his few remaining hairs. Jessie retired as if nothing had happened.

The little boy, suddenly wearying of the clock, came over. "Want to sit on yer knee," he piped. And Mr. Redhorn took him up, murmuring awkwardly, "Ye're welcome."

For a brief space the painter forgot his anxiety in the novelty of the experience. Then the little boy began to emit sounds of a hiccupy nature, suggesting that he was still in a highly aerated condition.

"Does it hurt ye?" Mr. Redhorn stammered, and was only partially reassured by an emphatic shake of the small head.

A knock at the door. The mother had come for her own.

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"I hope they'll be nane the waur," said Mr. Redhorn, interrupting her final flow of thanks from the doorstep.

"Oh, it's been a splendid treat for them," she repeated, while her elder son, laden with his

putty, asserted that it had knocked the last Sabbathschool treat into a cocked hat.

Mr. Redhorn smiled sadly. "I'm maybe a pessimist," he said, "but I've a motto which says: *'Efter the treat comes the treatment';* an' I trust ye'll no' be offended if ye receive the treatment later. Guid nicht," he concluded hurriedly.

Mrs. Tosh's mystification over the motto evaporated an hour later, when she opened an oblong parcel delivered by the grocer's boy. Under the brown paper she found a full-size bottle of "Dyspepsia Elixir."

III

THE PLEDGE

MR. REDHORN, drowsily absorbed in giving his toes a final toasting preparatory to putting them and the rest of himself to bed, was startled by a light tapping on the door of his bachelor abode.

"Wha can it be at this time o'nicht?" he muttered, getting into his ancient carpet slippers.

The tapping was repeated, still softly, but more insistently.

Mr. Redhorn, buttoning his waistcoat, shuffled unwillingly to the door.

"Wha's there?"

"Me. . . . John Forgie!"

"John Forgie!" The painter's astonishment was not unnatural, considering that Mr. Forgie, though familiar as a neighbour, had never called upon him before. "I was preparin' to retire," he continued. "Is't onything important?"

"Ay, it's important, but I'll no' keep ye lang."

Mr. Redhorn opened the door.

"Step in," he said hospitably enough.

"Thenk ye," replied the visitor, entering. He was a little, middle-aged man, with moist blue eyes, a fat, foolish, kindly countenance, side-whiskers of a faded reddish hue, and a notably bald head. "I'm vexed for disturbin' ye at this time o' nicht," he remarked, crossing to the hearth while the host closed the door. "But the thing couldna stan', for I've got to gang to Glesca the morn by the early boat." Without waiting for an invitation he seated himself in Mr. Redhorn's easy-chair, and smiled blandly at nothing in particular.

"I'm sorry I canna offer ye a ceegar," said the painter, with an ironical grimace, as he came towards the hearth.

"Thenk ye; but I'll jist try yin o' yer ceegarettes"—he helped himself from a packet on the shelf at his elbow—"though to ma mind ceegarettes arena worth the smokin'. Ha'e ye a match?"

Mr. Redhorn, repressing his irritation, passed a box from the mantelpiece.

"Thenk ye." The little man lit up, and put the box in his pocket. "I suppose ye dinna happen to ha'e a bottle o' beer handy, Ridhorn?" he said pleasantly.

"Yer supposeetion," replied the painter stiffly, "is correc'."

Mr. Forgie sighed. "Or whusky?"

"The answer is in the negative."

"Or . . . rum?"

"I can gi'e ye a nice gless o' castor-ile," said Redhorn grimly.

Undismayed, the visitor sniggered. "It's you for the jocular," he remarked, bending forward to poke up the embers in the grate.

"See here, Maister Forgie," the painter said, restraining his temper with difficulty, "I'm sorry to disapp'int ye in yer quest for fluid refreshment, but the time is noo ten-forty p.m., an' I've a job at six the morn's mornin'."

"Ay, it's a peety aboot the refreshment. I could ha'e done fine wi' a dram, but I'm no' the man to tak' offence when I ken nae offence is intended. Ye see—"

"Weel, weel," the host interrupted impatiently, "I'll maybe ha'e a bottle o' ginger wine on tap the next time ye favour me wi' a call—if it's no' later nor nine o'clock."

"Thenk ye," said Mr. Forgie, as he helped himself to a fresh cigarette, having chewed most of the first. "But ye're no' to think I cam' here the nicht lookin' for hospitality. Na, na Ridhorn! Ye're no' to think that!"

"What am I to think?"

"Sit doon, an' I'll tell ye."

"Is—is it a lang story?"

Mr. Forgie shook his shiny head emphatically.

"Sit doon, an' I'll tell ye."

With considerable reluctance Mr. Redhorn took the deal chair at the table. "Proceed," he said, in a weary voice, passing his hand over his hair.

The other smirked. "Ye'll never guess what I'm here for, Ridhorn."

"I ha'e nae intention o' tryin'."

"Weel, I'll tell ye. I'm here"—snigger—"for to sign the pledge."

"The pledge?" Mr. Redhorn looked hard at his visitor. "Ye appear to be sober."

"Ay, I'm sober. I ha'ena tasted a drap the day."

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose. "But—but ye've jist been askin' me for beer, whusky, etceetera!"

"I could ha'e done wi' a fareweel dram," said Mr. Forgie, with a sigh. "But a' the same, I'm here to sign the pledge—the teetotal pledge."

"Are ye in earnest?"

"It's no' a thing I wud joke aboot," replied the visitor, relieving himself rather violently of some shreds of tobacco.

"But what way dae ye come to me? I've never pledged masel', though I'm for temperance in a' shapes an' sizes. It's true I'm an abstainer, but, unlike Timothy, I avoid wine for the sake o' ma interior. Ma abstention is naething to ma

credit. If ye want to sign the pledge, John, ye should gang to the meenister."

"I'm no' in wi' the meenister the noo," returned Mr. Forgie, taking a third cigarette. "He was awfu' snuffy aboot the account I sent him for testin' his drains. He couldna see that their bein' in guid order had done me oot o' a job."

"An honest plumber," observed Mr. Redhorn, "is yin o' heaven's maist wondrous handiworks."

"If I was gaun to the meenister for to sign the pledge," continued Mr. Forgie, ignoring the remark, "he micht tak' it as a sort o' apology. Besides it was ower later to gang there, an' as I tell't ye, I'm off in the early boat to the city—wi' a' its temptations."

"I see," said the painter, more kindly than he had yet spoken. "Weel, John, if it's to witness yer signature, I'm ready. Ye're daein' a wise thing, an' I'm sure ye'll never repent it."

"I hope no'. I cam' to ye because I ken ye're a discreet sort o' chap—"

"Ye can rely on ma discreetion. I confess it's much the better part of valour in ma case. If it hadna been for ma discreetion, I micht ha'e been servin' ma country instead o' merely beautifyin' it," said the painter modestly, and rose. "Noo I'll provide pen, ink an' paper, an' then we'll carry through the operation wi' the least possible delay."

Mr. Forgie nodded, then sighed in a reflective fashion. "I suppose," he said, in a far-away voice, "it was the truth?"

"What?" inquired the painter, setting out writing materials on the table.

"That ye've nae refreshment handy. It's gey dry work signin' the pledge. I could dae wi' a final, an' you could drink to ma keepin' the pledge—in water, if ye prefer it."

"Come, come, John!" the painter said good-humouredly. "I can gi'e ye ma word of honour there's no' a drap in the hoose. Besides, it's better to dae the deed wi'oot ony artifeecial stimulation. It's a deed to be done in cauld blood."

"So let it be!" said Mr. Forgie resignedly. "You write oot the pledge, an' I'll sign it."

"I'll dae that." Mr. Redhorn seated himself at the table and pressed the end of the penholder against the point of his nose. "What am I to say?"

"Dear knows."

"Ye leave the composeetion to me? Vera well. I'll dae ma best."

At the end of ten minutes Mr. Redhorn read aloud the following:

"I, John Forgie, Plumber, of Fairport, being of sound mind and sober, doth hereby promise, in the presence of Joseph Redhorn, Painter, Paperhanger and Decorator, also of Fairport, to

solemnly abstain now and for evermore from all self-indulgence in all manner and species of intoxicating beverages, including Whisky, Brandy, Beer, Rum, Port, Sherry, &c., &c., &c. Given at Fairport on the 3rd day of March, 1913, A.D. Witness my hand and seal. God save the King."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Mr. Forgie. "Am I to sign that?"

"What's wrang wi' it?"

"Oh, naething—naething! I'll no' deny ye've the gift o' the gab, Ridhorn, but it's a fearsome document."

"It's maybe no' the orthodox form o' pledge," said the painter, "but I'll guarantee it leaves nae loophole for escape. Are ye afraid to sign it?"

"N-na, I wudna say I was afraid. I could ha'e done fine wi' a fareweel dr—"

"Tits, man! Ye'll feel different when ye've signed it. Come awa'! Here's the pen waitin' for ye."

With a doubtful grunt, Mr. Forgie rose and came to the table.

"That's where ye sign," said the painter encouragingly, indicating the place with the pen, which he then handed to his visitor.

"I see ye've made a blot," remarked the latter.

"That," said the painter, somewhat nettled, "represents yer seal. When ye've signed yer name, ye touch it wi' yer finger—"

"Strikes me there's a queer lot o' hanky-panky aboot this pledge," mumbled the other, as he scratched his name. "But onything for peace," he added, gingerly applying his forefinger to the blot.

"That's capital!" cried Mr. Redhorn in a tone of satisfaction, and seizing the pen, inscribed his name as witness. Then, having carefully dried the signatures with a scrap of blotting-paper in the last stage of dissolution, he folded the document, and—

"Here!" exclaimed Mr. Forgie. "Are *you* gaun to keep it?"

"Certainly! It'll be preserved among the archives o' the Hoose—sich as it is—o' Ridhorn." With these words Mr. Redhorn conveyed the document to the cupboard wherein he kept his cashbox and business papers. "Ye're pledge'll be safe here," he added kindly, "an', you, John, 'll be safe wherever ye gang."

Mr. Forgie rose and returned to the easy-chair. "I've done it noo!" he sighed, and helped himself to the last of the cigarettes.

The host winced, but said mildly enough:

"They say that virtue is its ain reward, but I hope ye'll be luckier in that respec' nor I've ever been. I think I may prophesy that ye'll sune be able to contemplate an improvin' bank account; an' while ye may ha'e to gang to bed

feelin' less glorious nor in the past, ye'll rise in the mornin' less gloomy. Moreover—"

"Man, ye're a spokesman!" interrupted the visitor, yawning and getting up. "Weel, I'm no sorry I signed it—yet."

"Ye'll never be sorry," said Mr. Redhorn, coming back to the hearth. "Ye see, John, if ye was gettin' a wife—I beg yer pardon," he apologised in haste, for the fat, foolish, kindly face had gone scarlet.

"Haw, haw!" Mr. Forgie laughed awkwardly. "What wud I dae wi' a wife? What put that into yer heid, Ridhorn?"

"Aw, I shouldna ha'e mentioned sic a thing," said the painter, bashfully. "But ye maun excuse me for no' bein' blin' to the fac' that a certain lady, wha shall be nameless, has recently been receivin' the attentions o' a certain gentleman wha shall likewise be minus a cognomen."

"A what?"

"Aw, ye ken what I mean," said Mr. Redhorn pleasantly. "An' I'm sure ye ha'e ma best wishes in yer amorous pursuit."

"Thenk ye, thenk ye!" murmured Mr. Forgie, still blushing profusely. "I'm sure I never thought ye guessed onything, but seein' ye've done it, I'll ask anither favour o' ye. If ye should happen to see her the morn, casual-like, I wish ye wud mention to her that I've signed

the pledge. To tell ye the plain truth, it was her that got me to dae it. She said—But never heed about that the noo. Will ye tell her, if ye see her?"

"I'll mak' a p'int o' seein' her," was the warm reply. "Depend on me! It is—is it ower early for congratulations, etceetera?"

"Ay, it's a wee thing early yet. I'm greatly obleeged to ye. But ye'll no' mention it to onybody but her—eh?"

"As heaven is ma witness," declared the painter, who was not a little excited, "I'll no' breathe it to a livin' soul excep' her."

"Thenk ye. . . . Weel, I'll awa' hame to ma bed. I could ha'e done fine wi' a—"

"Listen, John! If at ony time ye are tormented by a consumin' thirst, jist drap in here. I'll ha'e a bottle o' ginger wine ready. It's no' a beverage that induces ye to sing, dance, or break windows, but it's cosy on the interior an' is said to promote digeestion. So mind that, John, an' come when the spirit moves ye."

Once more the visitor expressed gratitude, and having again received the painter's assurance of secrecy, took his departure.

Mr. Redhorn went to bed, tired but unwontedly happy. It is true that until this evening he had been quite unaffected one way or another by the existence of John Forgie. It is equally

true, however, that he would have done as much for any other man who happened to need a helping hand.

Fairport was eating its midday meal when Mr. Redhorn kept his promise to Mr. Forgie. The lady dwelt in a trim two-roomed cottage, a furlong beyond the village, wherein she plied the genteel trade of dressmaking with moderate satisfaction to her customers and no great profit to herself.

Until a few weeks ago her living had been entirely dependent on the work of her hands, and no one doubted that she had difficulty in making ends meet. Happily this was no longer so. The timely death of a relative in Canada had endowed her with a sum of money, the interest on which, as variously calculated by her neighbours, would amount to something between one hundred and one hundred and fifty pounds a year. A month of comfort, physical and mental, had removed the harassed expression from her wizened, homely countenance; she no longer looked much more than her age, which was forty-three. To Mr. Redhorn, however, she, standing in her doorway, appeared the same as ever, for it is to be remembered that he and she were as strange to each other as two people in a small community like Fairport may be. A passing sal-

utation on the road, a bow on entering or leaving church—such was the extent of their acquaintanceship.

Having remarked that it was a fine day, and having received a solemn assent, Mr. Redhorn proceeded without delay to fulfil his mission.

"Miss Thomson," he said, "I ha'e called to inform ye that our mutual frien' John Forgie duly signed the pledge in ma presence, at eleeven o'clock or thereaboots, last nicht. Bein' boun' for Glesca the day, he deputed me to advise ye privately o' the fac'. I—I hope ye feel gratified."

"I'm gled to hear it," Miss Thomson replied, more calmly than the painter had anticipated. "I've been at him to sign it for a while back. I hope he'll keep it."

"Oh, I can assure ye there's nae escape frae the document he signed last nicht," said Mr. Redhorn earnestly.

"Weel, I'm obleeged to ye," she returned. "But I wasna aweer that *you* was a reformer, Maister Ridhorn. Are ye pledged yersel'?"

"Me?"

"Because, if ye're no', I'll be pleased to receive yer pledge, though, as a rule, I prefer to send ma reformed characters to the meenister."

It must be confessed that Mr. Redhorn simply gaped.

"Even if ye're no' in the habit o' drinkin', ye'll be safer when ye've ta'en the pledge," she continued. "I've aye understood ye to be a sober man, Maister Ridhorn, but even at your time o' life ye canna tell what temptations are afore ye. It's no' lang since I read aboot the case o' a man that fell for the first time at the age o' eighty-five. Ye'll maybe no' live as long as that; still—"

"Excuse me for interruptin' ye," said the painter, pulling his wits and dignity together. "I've naething to say against the pledge for them that needs it, but for me it wud be a pure redundancy. The details o' ma complaint—dyspeepsia—arena ch'ice enough for female ears, but I may tell ye in confidence that the flowin' bowl can never ha'e charms for me."

"Ye micht get better o' yer complaint," said Miss Thomson, in a tone that sounded heartless to the painter.

"In the event o' sich a miracle takin' place," he returned almost sharply, "I wud feel justified in drainin' a bumper to the man or medicine that cured me."

Miss Thomson shook her head.

"I didna think ye was a man o' levity," she sighed.

"Weel, I didna come here to hurt yer feelin's, he said gently, "nor to discuss masel', either. If

there's ony answer, I'll be pleased to convey it to him when he comes off the evenin' boat."

"Oh, ye can say I'm exceedin'ly pleased at what he's done," she said, adding, as though it was an afterthought: "An' ye can tell him he needna trouble to call the nicht, because I'll ha'e anither veesitor."

"Yer instructions'll ha'e ma best attention," Mr. Redhorn replied. He touched his hat, and left her looking rather wistfully after him.

As he passed down the path leading to the main road, he felt depressed.

"She doesna seem," he reflected, "to be passionately attached to him. . . . But maybe she's coy."

Turning into the road, he encountered Danks, the fishmonger.

"Weel, Ridhorn," said that worthy, "has she got ye to sign the pledge?"

The painter was taken aback, but managed to reply—

"Whether she has or no', Danks, we'll no' laugh at her."

"I'm thinkin' the laugh's on her side. D'ye ken hoo mony men she's got to sign the pledge, since she cam' into her money? Nine! An' every man o' them is a bachelor, excep' yin that's a widower. An' nane o' them was ever a hard drinker; some was practically teetotal."

"Criftens!" the painter ejaculated.

Danks grinned.

"An' each man o' the nine—or is it ten, Ridhorn?—thinks he's gaun to marry her an' her siller! Gor! it's a queer world." He passed on, leaving the painter dazed.

Mr. Forgie disembarked from the evening steamer without that glassiness of eye which usually distinguished him immediately after a trip to the city. At the same time he looked far from cheerful, and expressed himself to Mr. Redhorn as being "fair meeserable."

"Never heed, John," said the painter comfortingly, as they left the pier. "Ye'll sune get used to it. Temperance, like mony anither guid thing, is an acquired taste."

"I believe ye!" returned the novice bitterly. "Weel, did ye see her?" It was the question Mr. Redhorn had been dreading all the afternoon.

"I did. She was exceedin'ly gratified."

"Was she? Did she say onything else?"

"N-naething special, excep' that ye wasna to trouble to call on her the nicht, because she wud be ha'ein' a veesitor."

"Aw!" muttered the little man.

"I ha'ena had ma tea yet," said Mr. Redhorn hastily. "I'll be gled if ye'll jine me."

Mr. Forgie's acceptance of the invitation was more ready than gracious.

"I got in a bottle of ginger wine for ye."

Mr. Forgie groaned. "I tried a gless in the city. Thon's a terrible drink."

"Maybe ye didna get the best vintage," said the painter pleasantly, despite his wounded feelings. "A great deal depends on the vintage. Wait till ye sample mine's. I think I'll gi'e ye a stiff gless in bilin' water. The fumes alane are invigoratin'. By the way, I hope ye're partial to tinned sawmon, John, because I got in a tin for oor tea."

Apparently Mr. Forgie's feelings were not altogether invulnerable.

"My! ye're a dacent sort o' chap, Ridhorn!" he said. "I can shift tinned sawmon wi' ony man in Fairport."

"That's fine!" said the painter, opening the door of his abode.

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Whether the change was due to the tinned salmon, or to the ginger wine, or to both, is immaterial, since the fact remains that the guest grew brighter as the night waxed older. By ten o'clock hope was in full bloom.

Mr. Forgie nodded blithely over his reeking

tumbler, which his host had just charged for the fourth time.

"Here's to ye, Ridhorn! But ye're no' drinkin' yersel'."

"I've got to be abstemious, even wi' ginger wine," the painter replied. "But I'm gled ye find it palatable, John."

"Aw, it's no' so bad if ye tak' plenty," said Mr. Forgie, after a generous gulp. "I'll help masel' to anither o' yer ceegarettes, if ye've nae objections," he went on, suiting the action to the words. "On the whole, Ridhorn, I feel inclined to hope for the best wi' regard to—to her. D'ye no' agree wi' me?"

"'*Nil desperandum*' is a fine motto as lang as ye're no' bettin' on horses or dealin' in stocks. An' it's no' as if ye had proposed an' she had rejected yer suit—"

"But I *ha'e* proposed." Mr. Forgie wiped his brow, and went red in the face. "Ach, I better tell ye a' aboot it," he said, laughing feebly. "I proposed last nicht, an' she said she wud need a month to conseeder it. Of course, she couldna conseeder it at a' unless I signed the pledge, for she said she could never respec' ony man that hadna signed it. That's the poseetion, pure an' simple."

"So ye'll no' ken for a month?" Mr. Redhorn's glance strayed from his guest to the de-

pleted bottle, and thence to the clock. Then he pulled himself together. "Weel, ma best wishes are yours, John," he said kindly.

Mr. Forgie drew a long breath, and his countenance grew rosier than ever.

"I wud like ye to understan', Ridhorn," he said, eyeing his cigarette, "that I'm no' courtin' her for her siller alane."

The painter's soul was touched. "Ye're a noble character!" he exclaimed and held out his hand.

The other took it with a sigh. "I'm afraid I'm no' exactly that," he said modestly, "for, to tell ye the truth, it was the siller that catched me to begin wi'. But when I seen her takin' sic an interest in ma—ma behaviour, an' so forth, I began to feel different. In fac', I wud marry her if she hadna a penny. Trade's no' half bad the noo." And Mr. Forgie buried his nose in his tumbler.

"Spoke like a man!" cried Mr. Redhorn: "Forby bein' a noble character, ye're in ma opeenion a maist deservin' suitor. Could ye eat a bit toasted cheese, jist to feenish off the evenin'?"

"I could!" was the ready reply.

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It was after midnight when Mr. Redhorn found himself free to go to bed.

"This wudna need to happen every nicht," he told himself as he blew out the candle. "I wudna like to see Forgie dae a backslide, but a week o' similar dissipation wud leave me a corp."

Nevertheless at the end of a month, nearly every night of which had meant a late sitting, Mr. Redhorn was still faithful to his self-imposed trust. It is true that he was afflicted with a feeling of "general debility," and was disposed to yawn at all hours of the day; but if his flesh was weak, his strength of spirit was surely proved by the fact that he had "laid doon," as he somewhat grandiloquently expressed it, a third dozen of ginger wine.

And so we come to that evening which Mr. Redhorn, in a bright outburst, described as "maybe the last o' a series o' ambrosial symposiums."

"Ye can ca' them what ye like, Joseph," said the guest with unusual warmth, "but I'll never forget them, nor you, either. Ye've been a guid, solid frien' to me; an' if it was her that got me to sign the pledge, it's been you that has made me keep it. That's flat!"

Mr. Redhorn blew his nose. It was one of the happiest and proudest moments of his life. "I think I micht risk a second gless the nicht,"

he said softly, uncorking the bottle. "An' so ye're feelin' quite hopeful aboot the morrow, John? Eh?"

"I'm no despairin', onyway. Ye see, when I've been seein' her lately, I've aye reminded her o' the date, an' every time I've done that she's been mair an' mair—" Mr. Forgie paused and scratched his head.

"Coy," suggested the painter. "I believe coyness is conseedered a favourable symptom by ardent suitiors."

"Maybe it was coy. At ony rate, she didna seem able to look me in the face, an' it used to be the ither way aboot."

"It soun's promisin', John, it soun's promisin'. . . . Weel, I hope I'll be the first to hear the joyful' news the morn's nicht."

"Ye can coont on that, Joseph! I doobt it'll mean anither symphonium, or whatever ye ca' it," the little man laughed, as he presented his empty tumbler. "Oh, ay, I'm no' dispairin'!"

On the following afternoon Mr. Redhorn found it necessary to make inquiries of the pier-master concerning the non-arrival of certain paints, of the despatch of which he had received notice by the morning post. When he reached the pier the steamer for the city was approach-

ing, and the piermaster requested him to wait until her departure.

Mr. Redhorn, having nothing better to do, strolled up the pier. As usual, there were few travellers, and, with one exception, they did not interest the painter. The exception was Miss Thomson. Somehow he started at the sight of her. Perhaps she started, though less obviously, at the sight of him. But the head of a little pier like Fairport's is not the place for people who wish to avoid each other.

"Fine day—at least it was in the mornin'—remarked Mr. Redhorn, touching his hat. "Are ye for an hour on the ither side, Miss Thomson?" She had seemed quite a terrible person a month ago, but now she struck him as being merely pathetic. "This is a handy boat if ye want to dae a bit shoppin' an' be hame for tea," he added.

"Ay," she murmured, and glanced furtively shorewards. "Maister Ridhorn," she whispered abruptly, "I wish ye wud dae me a favour."

"Surely—Ha'e ye forgot yer purse?"

She shook her head. "Try and get John Forgie to keep the pledge," she said.

"Eh?"

"Because—because I'm no' comin' back to Fairport."

The steamer came alongside. The end of

line struck Mr. Redhorn on the shoulder. He did not seem to notice it.

"Ye're no'—comin' back to Fairport!" he repeated slowly, wonderingly.

"Ma luggage is a' packed, an' it'll follow me the morn. I'm sellin' ma furniture. I—I'm leavin' quiet-like. It seemed the best way." She paused. Apparently, Mr. Redhorn had nothing to say. He was stroking his nose.

She checked a sob, and continued: I've bought a wee business in Glesca—baby-linen an' the like. I've been bargainin' for it for ower a month."

The steamer was warped; the gangway clattered aboard.

Still Mr. Redhorn said nothing.

"I—I wanted to dae some guid in Fairport afore I left," she said; and now the tears were running. "I got twelve to tak' the pledge." For an instant she lifted her head—defiantly. "I wish you had been the thirteenth, but it's no' ower late yet." She fumbled for her handkerchief. "But ye'll look efter John Forgie—promise, Maister Ridhorn!—for he was the worst o' the lot."

The painter found his voice. "Did ye—did ye no' care tuppence for John—or ony o' them?"

She reddened painfully, yet there were remnants of the defiance in her breaking voice. "I

did the best I could for them a'. I wanted to dae some guid—"

"Are ye gaun wi' the boat, Miss Thomson?" It was the piermaster's voice. "Time's up."

She turned and fled across the gangway, across the deck, and down the companion.

Mr. Redhorn, forgetting his appointment with the piermaster, went the way he had come.

"Puir thing!" he said to himself. "But she's got a unique conscience."

And then he thought of John Forgie, and was smitten with fear and trembling, not without reason.

* * * * *

"I'm sayin' I want back ma pledge!" The little man was half crazy.

"Sit doon, John, sit doon," said Mr. Redhorn, soothingly. "Ha'e ye had yer tea?"

"To blazes wi' tea! I want beer!"

"Sit doon an' tell me yer story."

"Ye ken it as weel as I dae. I've been diddled—that's a'!"

"Weel, tak' it like a man."

"I intend for to tak' it like the ither men she's diddled. They're a' in the beershop noo—every man jack o' them!"

"Ha'e they a' been to the meenister to get back their pledges?"

"Their pledges was got under fause pretences.

Their pledges is waste paper—that's what they say."

"Then yours'll be waste paper likewise, eh?"

"Maybe. But I canna—I canna—" Mr. Forgie's hand went to his unintellectual brow.

"Sit doon, man," said the painter softly, and pressed him into the easy-chair. "See—smoke a ceegarette—here's matches—till I get the tea ready. I ha'ena had mine's yet. I was waitin' for *you,* John. There's a nice bit o' corned beef an' plenty of mustard. . . . Will ye try a drap o' ginger wine to begin wi'? It'll maybe stimulate yer appetite."

Mr. Forgie shook his head, and waved away the cigarettes and matches.

"What for should I keep the teetotal noo?" he asked sullenly.

For several seconds Mr. Redforn stroked his nose. "Weel," he began slowly, "there's sundry reasons. First, ye've kep' it for a month. Secondly, there's nae credit in bein' a relapsed mass. Thirdly, in ma opeenion, it's the only way to prove to the public o' Fairport that ye ha'ena been diddled."

"Eh? Hoo d'ye mak' that oot?"

"Because, if ye keep yer pledge, the public'll naturally asshume that ye took it oreeginally for yer ain pleasure an' satisfaction."

"Oh!"

"I may say that I'm ready to drap a hint here an' there to that effec'. I dinna ask ye," the painter continued, "to conseeder ma feelin's in the matter, John. If ye demanded back the pledge, I wud jist ha'e to gi'e ye back yer ain property. An' then it wud be me that had been diddled."

"Na, na!"

"But ay! At least, that's the way I wud feel aboot it. It's true that I had naething to dae wi' hoistin' the flag o' temperance, so to speak, but—"

"But by Go!" suddenly cried the little man, "ye kep' it flyin'!"

"I didna mean that. Naebody could ha'e done that but yersel'. I was gaun to say I wud be vexed to se eit hauled doon noo." Mr. Redhorn laid a hand on the other's shoulder. "I wud like to think," he said heavily, "that there was one *man* in the dizzen that courted her."

There was a silence. Doubtless the picture then of these two middle-aged men—the long, melancholy visage, the fat, foolish, kindly countenance—was more odd than impressive; but we can't all look like heroes in our hours of crisis.

"Joseph," said Mr. Forgie huskily, "I'll tak' the ginger wine—neat."

The painter, his face illuminated, fetched a brimming glass.

"Here's to ye, Joseph!" Mr. Forgie gulped half of the stuff and puffed.

"John," said the host, with much diffidence, "could ye no' drink the rest to—her? She meant weel."

The little man's lips came together, and an angry colour suffused his face.

"I admit there's nae justifyin' her methods," Mr. Redhorn went on, "an' if ye was wantin' revenge, it could be easily managed, for she *thinks* she's left a dizzen reformed characters in Fairport. But if there's ony person been badly diddled in the affair, it's her, puir thing—John, ye can afford to drink her health—in silence, if ye prefer." The painter turned to the fire, for the kettle was boiling.

Shamefacedly the little man emptied the glass.

IV

THE OPPOSITION MAN

WHEN the door had closed on the bringer of ill-tidings, Mr. Redhorn reseated himself at the table, smoothed his remaining hairs with an unsteady palm, sighed, and turned to his apprentice, whom he happened to be entertaining to tea.

"Proceed wi' yer eatin', laddie," he said kindly. "Tak' plenty jam. When ye're young ye maun pey attention to yer inside, whatever happens. As for me, I'll try a ceegarette, though I doobt it's a dooble dose o' the Elixir I'm requirin'."

"I wish Danks was deid!" the boy cried hotly. "I wish he was—"

"Na, na; ye maunna wish that aboot onybody, Wullie. He was boun' to hear the bad news suner or later—"

"But it was the way he tell't ye it."

"Ay, ay"—Mr. Redhorn produced a cigarette from a packet—"it was the way he tell't me. I confess to bilin' inwardly masel', though I trust I didna betray ma feelin's. But, ye see, Danks has never got ower his spite at me for no' takin'

his nephew for ma apprentice instead o' yersel'. Moreover, he was aye cauld-heartit, like the fish he sells. Oh, ay, he was rale delighted to be the bearer o' the bad news. It's a curious thing," the painter continued, reflectively, "hoo humanity delights in inhumanity on what I micht ca' a sma' scale. It doesna rej'ice in a railway accident, but it likes fine to behold a man tummle on a slide; it doesna cry 'hurray!' when a bank breaks, but, apparently, it canna keep back a bit snicker when it sees a neighbour lossin' money. An' it hasna aye the excuse Danks has for rej'icin' at ma misfortune."

"What excuse has Danks, Maister Ridhorn?" inquired Willie, still flushed, reaching for the jam-pot.

"I've jist been tellin' ye." The bachelor struck a match, applied it cautionsly to his cigarette, coughed violently, and wiped his faded blue eyes. "I wish I had never startit the smokin', Wullie," he resumed; "but I was tell't it was soothin' to the nerves. Strikes me I micht as weel try it for ma chilblains." He took a puff or two. "Nevertheless, Danks is a cruel enemy. If I was a blackamoor that believed in the transfiguration o' souls, I wud say Danks was oreeginally a finnan haddie. But there's nae use talkin' aboot it, Wullie. We'll jist ha'e to try an' bear it."

"Ay," said Willie, "but what are ye gaun to dae aboot the opposeetion, when it comes?"

"Ye've a practical mind, ma lad. Whiles I doobt mine's is becomin' ower pheelosophical. Yer question is to the p'int, though it's maybe a wee thing previous. What wud *you* advise me to dae aboot the opposeetion—when it comes?"

"Burst it," was the prompt reply.

"That wud be exceedin' excellent advice if the opposeetion was appearin' in the shape of a balloon; but as it happens to assume the form o' a human bein' conseederably younger nor masel' an', accordin' to Danks, supplied wi' plenty o' capital, I canna but feel that ye spoke hasty—"

"I meant that ye could keep on daein' jobs cheaper nor the opposeetion man till ye burst him."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "It's a guid thing ye're gaun to be a penter, Wullie, or ye micht live to be what they ca' a high feenancier. But I may tell ye I've been the sole penter, paperhanger an' decorator in Fairport for upwards o' thirty year, an—weel, I ha'ena made a fortune. An' though ye're but an apprentice in the first blush o' youth, as the novelles say, ye ken as weel as I dae that there's no' enough business in Fairport to keep two penters busy."

"Maybe the folk'll no' gang to the opposeetion

man," said Willie. "It's likely they'll stick to you."

The painter sighed. "When ye're as auld as me ye'll ken mair aboot the flightiness o' the public. Changes are lichtsome. The new shop aye gets custom—maybe no' enough to mak' it prosper, but suffeecient to hurt the auld shop, if no' to ruin it completely."

"But ye'll no' let the opposeetion man burst ye?" the boy exclaimed. " I meant for to say—"

"That'll dae, Wullie, that'll dae. I'm no' in the habit o' meetin' trouble hauf-roads—unless the trouble happens to be dyspeepsia," with which remark Mr. Redhorn rose, and taking the bottle of "Elixir" from the mantel-piece, removed the cork and helped himself to a mouthful. "Ay," he went on with sundry grimaces, "we'll see what the public o' Fairport is made o'."

"But what'll ye dae when ye see the opposeetion man?" persisted the apprentice.

"An' what wud you ha'e me dae?" the painter asked a little impatiently. "Pit oot ma tongue at him?"

"I'll dae that if ye like, Maister Ridhorn; but I wud suner hand him a bat on the nose, or knock him ower the pierheid, an'—"

"Wullie," said Mr. Redhorn impressively, "politeness costs naething—in cash, at ony rate.

When the man starts business here the eye o' Fairport'll be on you an' me as weel. Mind that! Be dignified, be discreet. Conceal yer feelin's o' righteous indignation. Pay attention to yer job, whatever it happens to be, as if naething extraor'nar was occurrin'. In ither words, let Fairport see that we dinna care a fig—help yersel' to jam, laddie—for a' the opposeetion in the world!"

Presently Willie having finished his repast, remarked: "They say Maister Hood up the hill is for gettin' his hoose pentit sune. Ye should hurry up and get the order afore—"

"I think we'll leave Maister Hood to the opposeetion," Mr. Redhorn interrupted, with a faint smile.

"What way that?"

"Weel, ye see, Wullie, Maister Hood, as ye may learn frae ma ledger, which is a record o' disapp'intments, tak's frae twa an' a hauf to three years' credit. Efter a', there's a few customers I wudna grudge to the opposeetion."

"'Deed, ye're fly!"

"I wud prefer ye to use the word 'discreet,' ma lad. Noo ye best rin hame an' see if ye canna dae anything to help yer mither. See an' be at yer work prompt to time in the mornin', an' no' gi'e Fairport ony excuse for complaints."

"But ye're no' feart for the opposeetion, are ye?" said Willie, taking up his cap.

"Dae I look feart?" demanded the painter.

"N-na," Willie replied, from the door. "No' exac'ly feart. Maybe it's yer dyspeepsia. I hope it'll sune be better. Guid nicht, Maister Ridhorn."

"Guid nicht, laddie." Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose. "Am I feart?" he muttered. "Or is't ma face?"

The Opposition Man had made his preliminary visits to Fairport *incog.;* he had spied the land without proclaiming his intentions to any of the inhabitants, whom, as a matter of fact, he misled by certain actions into taking him for an inspector of telegraph poles. It was not until he had rented a cottage on the shore and instructed the local joiner to erect a wooden workship that the truth so disturbing to Mr. Redhorn, so gratifying to Mr. Danks, became known. Mr. Redhorn, being the sort of man who does not become popular until death has covered a few little weaknesses and uncovered many good deeds, was not an object for the united sympathy of the villagers and owners of villas in the vicinity. People began to remember his failings, his sins of omission and commission. Some expressed the opinion that the opposition would

serve him right, others the pious hope that it might improve the quality of his workmanship and materials.

"It'll maybe learn him to feenish his jobs when he says he'll feenish them," said old Miss McPhun, who for seven weary years had been disputing the correctness of an account for painting a hen-house.

"Ay," said her neighbour, Mrs. Dory, whose husband had once been offended by Mr. Redhorn's refusal to accept cabbages instead of cash for the varnishing of a dinghy. " was hearin' that the opposeetion man is frae the toon, so he'll be smart an' up-to-date, as they say. Ridhorn'll ha'e to look slippy if he doesna want to loss custom."

The village was full of rumours. The new man was "backed" by a powerful firm in the city; he was determined to capture the painting trade of Fairport; already he had secured the contract for painting the pier; sooner or later he would buy out Joseph Redhorn. As for Redhorn, he was thinking of retiring; he would retire at the end of the year; he had decided to retire forthwith; he had declared his intention of fighting to his last penny. And so on. Willie reported all he heard to his master, who looked angry or miserable or impatient, but for the most part held his tongue. The opposition was cast-

ing its shadow before. Already Mr. Redhorn was disappointed by several old customers on whose patronage he reckoned at that time of the year. It was plain to him that those people were waiting to see what the new painter was like.

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On the first of March the local postman delivered to most of the inhabitants of Fairport envelopes bearing half-penny stamps and a city postmark. The envelopes contained squares of glossy pink paper, printed in seven styles of type as follows—

P. Smith
Respectfully begs to intimate to
The Residents in Fairport
And the Surrounding District
That he is commencing Business
as
Painter, Paper-hanger and Decorator
and trusts
To be favoured with their esteemed
Commands
P. Smith's
Motto is
Punctuality, Promptitude and Perfection.

Willie's mother having received a copy, the boy took it along to his master, who chanced to be painting a summer-house. After a prolonged inspection Mr. Redhorn carefully folded and returned it.

"Wullie," he said slowly, "I've nae fault to find wi' the language o' Maister P. Smith, an' his motto is unreproachable. But the man that sends oot a circular on paper like that has nae mair artistic feelin's nor a—plumber."

"I thought it was a pretty colour, Maister Ridhorn."

"Ay; it's vera suitable for a sweetie-poke or a love letter. But ye're young yet, laddie. I'm no' blamin' ye. I've made blunders in ma time. I mind when I papered a parlor a vera pale yella for a leddy wi' a rid nose—"

"But what kin' o' paper wud ye pit on for a leddy wi' a rid nose?" inquired Willie, with genuine interest.

"A rich crimson wi' a decided pattern," replied Mr. Redhorn gravely. "Aye try to study yer customers. In the meantime pay attention to yer pentin'."

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Two days later, on a wet and windy afternoon, arrived Mr. P. Smith, a youngish man with a neat moustache, alert eyes and a jaunty step. His progress from the pier was witnessed by the bulk of Fairport's population. Mr. Redhorn, however, remained in his workshop, pretending to mix a supply of paint which he had no immediate occasion to use.

To him came the apprentice panting—"I seen him, Maister Ridhorn, I seen him!"

"Seen wha?"

"The opposeetion. He's jist come off the boat!"

"Did ye expec' him to come off an airyplane?"

Willie looked hurt. "I ran to tell ye as hard as I could," he protested.

"Thenk ye, laddie." Mr. Redhorn's expression lost some of its stiffness. "Thenk ye; but I'm no' deeply interrested in the advent o' P. Smith, Esquire, penter, paperhanger an' decorator."

"I thought ye was."

"Did ye?"

Willie glanced at his master and went over to the bench at the far end of the shop, where he began playing with a lump of putty.

At the end of a three minutes' silence, Mr. Redhorn, in a voice strange to his apprentice said:

"Wullie, mark ma words, I'm no gaun to lie doon to ony man in the pentin' trade. An', in the language o' yersel', I'm gaun to burst P. Smith inside o' a couple o' years!"

"My!" exclaimed Willie.

"What's the man like?" said Mr. Redhorn coldly.

"I didna see him extra weel. He was carryin' a baby."

"Ay. Did ye no' hear he had a wife an' five

"A baby!"

"Ay. So was his wife."

"His wife!"

weans, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Five weans!"

"Maybe it's six."

Mr. Redhorn let go the stick with which he had been stirring the paint. He smoothed his hair; he stroked his nose. "Five weans!" he murmured.

"Peter Shaw said he coonted six."

Mr. Redhorn did not seem to hear. After a longish silence he said—

"Wullie, there's naething daein' the day, so ye best awa' an' amuse yersel'."

"Wud ye no' like me to gang an' see hoo the opposeetion's gettin' on? His furniture's got soaked wi' the rain, an' I heard three o' his weans was sea-seeck on the boat."

Mr. Redhorn looked at his apprentice. "Jist you gang hame an' tell that to yer mither, an' see what she says," he said gently.

When Willie had gone he resumed stirring the paint.

"Five weans!" he murmured. "Criftens! that's a handicap—on Joseph Ridhorn!"

Few things evaporate so quickly as the public's interest in an individual; few so slowly as the individual's interest in the public. For a week or so Fairport wondered about P. Smith. (His Christian name had not come to light; he never mentioned or wrote it, and his wife, a pretty woman with a patient mouth and anxious eyes, invariably addressed or referred to him as "Father.") After a week or so P. Smith began to wonder about Fairport. It was as though he had taken a high dive before a crowd, and had risen, gasping, only to ask himself where all the people had gone, and later, to doubt if anyone had really cared whether he sank or swam.

At the same time, P. Smith made friends in Fairport. He was a pleasant fellow and avoided exhibiting his city ways and wit at the expense of his more sluggish-minded neighbours. Though he could not play bowls he became a member of the club, of which Mr. Danks, the fishmonger, was president. Possessed of a fair voice, he joined the church choir. He was first to put his hand in his pocket when a collection was taken for the widow Waldie.

And so far as work was concerned, he made a fair start. He was commissioned by the fishmonger to paint his shop inside and out, and he obtained the pier contract. It is true that after the former job was finished, Mr. Danks

proposed settling the bill with a year's supply of fish, and, that being gratefully but firmly refused, withheld payment in cash until the creditor was fain to submit to a deduction of ten per cent. by way of discount. Then the second job must have resulted, according to Mr. Redhorn's calculations, in a net loss of £7. 15s.

It must not be imagined, however, that these things gave Mr. Redhorn any great satisfaction or prevented him from treating his opponent in courteous, if chilly, fashion.

"I seen ye speakin' to Smith again the day," said Willie one evening in May. "Did ye no' hear he had gotten the job at the Manse?"

Said Mr. Redhorn: "He's welcome to that job. As for speakin' to the man, did ye never hear o' gladiators salutin' each ither afore commencin' to stab each ither in the vittles? As I've already informed ye, politeness costs naething. P. Smith kens as weel as I dae that it's war to the knife—"

"My! Wud ye stab the man, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Metaphorically speakin'," said Mr. Redhorn, "I wud! But as lang as he salutes me, I'll salute him."

"Aw," said Willie, disappointedly. "There's awfu' little trade for us the noo," he added.

"Ye're gettin' yer wages a' the same."

"D'ye think ye'll manage to burst him in twa years?"

"Less nor that," replied the painter, in a boastful tone that was new to the boy. "Gi'e me a twelve-month, ma lad."

"Ye're a corker!" cried Willie, involuntarily. "I mean ye're awfu' savage—brave, I mean."

"Wullie, I'm gaun to confide in ye. I've swallowed an insult, an' it hasna agreed wi' me. In the course o' oor conversation the day, P. Smith informed me that he had been through the Manse, inspectin' it afore concoctin' his estimate. The word 'concoctin' ' is mine's. He likewise informed me that it appeared to be mony years since the Manse was last pentit an' papered, an' that, in his opeenion, the man that done the job maun ha'e had the notions an' taste o' a hippopotamus sufferin' frae hydrophobia—"

Willie laughed and stopped short.

"The man that done it," said Mr. Redhorn hoarsely, "was *me*."

"Did ye tell him? I wonder ye didna hand him a bat on—"

"I—I preferred that he should learn the truth frae some ither party. But, as aforesaid, the insult has disagreed wi' me."

"Like the tinned sawmon ye had last week?"

"That's enough!" said the painter sternly.

After a pause the boy asked. "Dae ye want *me* to tell him aboot the Manse, Maister Ridhorn?"

"In the meantime I prefer him to conteenue

in his meeserable eegnorance, laddie. Let the truth confound him in due season. I may say that he referred to ma oreeginal stencil o' conventional comets on the staircase as deleerious sassiges—"

"I doobt he kent it was you a' the time, an' was takin' a rise oot o' ye."

"A rise oot o' *me?*" Mr. Redhorn sat down in his easy-chair.

"I've a guid mind to heave a brick through his window the nicht," said Willie svmpathisingly.

"Na, na. Nae violence," said Mr. Redhorn. "Ye best awa' hame," he said presently in an almost natural voice. "Divulge naething o' what ye've heard here. *But*—gi'e me a twelve-month frae this date!"

Left to himself he took up a penny novelette and endeavoured to become absorbed in its villainies and virtues. But as he read he muttered: "Hippopotamus—hydrophobia—deleerious sassiges!"

Verily there were worse afflictions than the loss of money.

Upon what precisely Joseph Redhorn based his estimate of his opponent's financial staying power will probably never be known. Perhaps he gained a hint from the man's manner, which to his shrewd enough intelligence seemed arti-

ficially buoyant; perhaps he guessed something from the face of the man's wife. Or it may have been only bluff when he named a twelvemonth to his apprentice. The fact remains that his estimate turned out to be correct. If anything, it had erred on the safe side. As Mr. Redhorn had said, there was not sufficient work in Fairport for two painters, and that particular year brought even fewer orders than usual. Then in the autumn Mrs. P. Smith had a baby, and in the winter three of her children took measles. Just before the new year P. Smith's paint store went on fire, and the damage was not covered by insurance. P. Smith was seen less frequently in the choir and oftener in the beer-shop. He avoided his rival in trade. But his manner was more buoyant than ever. He talked briskly, perhaps feverishly, of the orders he was going to secure for the approaching Spring.

* * * * *

On a snowy night in February Mr. Redhorn, seated at his hearth, was turning over the pages of his ledger, and muttering pessimistic comments, when Willie dropped in without invitation. He was a bearer of news.

"Maister Ridhorn, d'ye ken what they're sayin' ootbye?"

"They're sayin' it's bitter cauld, I suppose. The fragidity o' ma feet has never been surpassed."

"They're sayin' that P. Smith hasna bought ony butcher meat for a month, an' they're sayin' that Danks the fishmonger is gaun to summon him to the court for his fish accoont. I seen him gaun into the beer-shop as I cam' by.

Mr. Redhorn, having set the boy's usual refreshment on the table, sat down slowly.

"Aw!" he muttered.

"An they're sayin there was a man here frae Glesca the day, tryin' to get money oot o' him."

Mr. Redhorn reopened his ledger without remark.

"So," said Willie, "it strikes me ye've aboot burst P. Smith—eh?"

"I've jist been reckonin' up that I've lost aboot sixty pound in the twelve-month."

"But ye've burst him noo."

"Haud yer tongue, laddie!"

Willie gaped at his master. "I thought ye wud be pleased," he said at last.

"Maybe I'm ower pleased for words," was the reply. The painter continued more gently: "Onyway, we'll converse on ither subjects, Wullie. Efter a', it's a terrible thing to see a fellow creature beat—espaycially a fellow creature wi' a wife an' five sma' weans—"

"Six," said Willie.

"Ay, six. I had got into the habit o' thinkin' o' five. . . . Drink up, an' I'll walk hame wi' ye."

About two hours later P. Smith came out of the beer-shop. He had had some beer—not much, for his money was done, and no one had offered to treat him. He had spent the evening in a corner by himself. He came forth alone. The snow was falling densely, driven by a breeze from the southeast. He could see no one abroad in the village. He crossed the road and stood against the sea-wall, beyond the rays of light from the few windows which had not been shuttered. Gradually his figure became white. Beneath him, invisible, the sea cried softly. . . .

Ere long the door of the beer-shop opened; the last of its patrons came forth and hurried homewards. The outer door was shut and bolted; a little later the window went black. Other lights went out in the village until only two were left—one close at hand, the other very far (so it seemed) away. The near light was in the home of Joseph Redhorn, the distant one in that of the man standing by the sea-wall.

Some minutes passed, and then P. Smith moved in the direction of the nearer light. But he did not move far. Halting, he shook his head. A sob burst from his throat. Turning abruptly, he almost ran towards the pier. Presently he was fumbling at the gate.

"I think it's locked," said a timid voice, and Mr. Redhorn stepped from the porch of the pier-house.

For a moment P. Smith peered at him; then he leaned against the gate, speechless, trembling.

Mr. Redhorn cleared his throat. "It—it—it's a bad nicht for folk wi' chilblains," he remarked, "but I—I had to come oot for a breather for ma dyspeepsia. That's hoo I happen to be here. . . . Weel, seein' we've met, what d'ye say to a gless o' ginger wine at ma fireside, afore ye gang hame, Smith?" Without waiting a reply, he put him arm through the other's.

P. Smith went with him like a sleepy child. Indoors he allowed himself to be conducted to his host's chair, a glass of ginger wine placed in his hand—without a word.

"Sup it up," said Mr. Redhorn. "I'll ha'e yin masel'." They drank in silence.

It was not until the host had taken the guest's empty glass that the dazed look began to pass from the latter's face.

Said P. Smith, at last, huskily: "We came to Fairport, because I thought it would be good for the children."

"Surely," Mr. Redhorn murmured.

"And I—I had the notion o' startin' on my own account."

"Jist that."

"My wife—my wife thought I was better in the situation I was in."

"Did she?"

There was a pause.

"Noo an' then," said Mr. Redhorn cautiously, "a woman's richt. It happens so—occasionally. Ay—to be sure—precisely." He coughed. "Maybe Mistress Smith'll be wonderin'—"

The visitor half rose and sank back. He was not yet fit to go. His eyes once so bright and alert, fell before Mr. Redhorn's, always so dull and tired.

"My God!" he whispered, "I'm done!"

"Na, na!" said Mr. Redhorn, nervously. "Ye maun never say that, this side o' the tomb. Man—Smith!" he cried aloud, "I'm vexed for ye—sair vexed for ye. I—I didna want ye here; but—but I dinna like to see ony man beat. But maybe ye're no' beat yet?"

"I'm finished! Oh, you know it, after what you've seen to-night."

Mr. Redhorn stood up, his long thin body quivering. "Oh, Lord!" he whispered, "is there ony earthly business that isna someway damnable in Thy sicht?" He stole towards the other man, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "Smith, if I had been a younger man, it's likely I wud ha'e got beat. It was jist a question o' age an' experience an' a wee bit o' capital."

"I've been an awful fool," mumbled P. Smith. "I saw I was wrong at the start, but I wouldn't turn back. My wife—"

"Ye didna ha'e a chance." Mr. Redhorn

began to pat his guest's shoulder. "See here, Smith, what are ye gaun to dae?"

"Go bankrupt."

"Na, na! Are ye—are ye agin takin' a seetuation again?"

"There's a situation waiting for me in Glasgow—if I could get away from here."

"An' why—"

"Redhorn, I'm chained up here wi' debt."

"Much?"

A sob, or something like it.

"Hoo much, Smith?"

"N—near fifty pound."

Mr. Redhorn walked slowly to the window and back. After considerable hesitation he said:

"Yer stock-in-trade'll be something. What wud ye be askin' for it?"

"Redhorn, if I was offered a fair job to-morrow I couldn't take it—for want o' materials."

"Weel, weel! . . . What aboot goodwill?"

At this P. Smith laughed drearily. "Goodwill! Oh, hell! What goodwill has a broken business like mine?"

Again Mr. Redhorn laid his hand on his guest's shoulder.

"Apart frae yer business," he said awkwardly, "I hereby—I hereby offer ye fifty pound—cash—for yer—goodwill."

* * * * *

It was still snowing when they set out.

"Ye're lucky no' to ha'e chilblains." Mr. Redhorn spoke in cheerful jerky fashion. "An' ye'll no' come to ma hoose till late the morn's nicht, mind, for it's a secret atween us. I'm gled ye're no' afflicted wi' the dyspeepsia, which is a trial for onybody wi' artistic feelin's. An' I'll ha'e the cash ready, so as ye can get awa' frae Fairport when it suits ye. Mind, ye're no' to think ye got beat here. If ye had come twinty year later, I wud ha'e fled frae the fray, so to speak. Ye jist happened to arrive at the wrang time. An' I'll come an' see ye when I'm in Glesca, an' meybe Mistress Smith'll gi'e me a dish o' tea. An' trust ye'll be fruitful an' multiply—etceetera. I think I best awa' hame noo." He held out his hand. "An' I forgive ye for yer remark aboot the hydropathic hippopotamus an' the insane sassiges."

"Oh!" said poor P. Smith, and got no further, for Joseph Redhorn literally ran away.

* * * * *

The P. Smiths left Fairport within the week. Doubtless it was by the merest chance that Mr. Redhorn happened to be on the pier at their departure, and Mr. Danks for long afterwards declared it was just rank hypocrisy that made the painter shake hands with them all, including the infant.

And even Willie still believes that his master "burst the Opposeetion Man."

V

A COSTLY NAP

"HELP yersel', John." Mr. Redhorn passed the ginger wine to his guest and glanced at the clock.

"Thenk ye, thenk ye." The reputed oldest inhabitant refilled his glass with a steadiness of hand remarkable at his time of life, took a mouthful of the harmless warming liquid, smacked his lips, and lay back in his chair with an air of satisfaction. "Ye're no' sayin' muckle for yersel' the nicht, Joseph," he remarked, pleasantly. "I've been waitin' to hear aboot yer veesit to the pictur' palace. I've been 'hearin' a lot aboot pictur' palaces lately. What did ye think o' it?"

The painter, who had been up at five a.m.—it was now ten p.m.—swallowed a yawn. "Oh, it was vera divertin' in its way. I confess I preferred the wild beasts to the human bein's that appeared afore ma gaze. The comic element was so-so—made ye laugh at the time, but never efterwards. As for the sensation, it was strong enough—an' plenty o' folk like their tea biled."

"What was the sensation?"

"I canna mind it a', I'm thenkful to be able to say. But among ither items, I seen a young female pit a carvin'-knife into a chap that was tryin' to sleep off the fumes o' noxious liquors. Moreover, I witnessed a bad man gettin' run ower by a steam road-roller. That gi'ed me a grue, I admit."

"What like was the corp?" Mr. McNab inquired with an interest worthier of a happier subject.

"I didna wait to see the remains, if ony," Mr. Redhorn replied.

"In ma youth," said the old man, "I wrought for a while on a traction ingine; an' on a dark mornin' we gaed ower a hen—or maybe it was a hedgehog."

"It wud be a' the same efter the mishap." The painter concealed another yawn. "On the whole, I dinna disapprove o' the cinematograph; like maist things in this warld, it has its guid p'ints. Ye should tak' Mistress McNab across the water some fine Seturday, an' see for yersel' what the pictur' palace is like. Efter a', an indiveedual subjec' like masel' to dyspeepsia an' ither fleshly ills isna the best qualified person for to criticise popular pleesures, an' I daresay you, John, bein' hale and hearty, wud find plenty to yer taste in the pictur' palace."

"I wud like fine to gang, but I ha'e ma doobts aboot the wife. Is—is the performance respectable?"

Mr. Redhorn removed his gaze from the clock to the fire. "Respectabeelity," he observed, "is a slacker belt nor it used to be. The great thing nooadays is breadth o' mind; depth is no' sae important. It's for the police to say what is an' what isna respectable—an' that saves oor consciences a heap o' worry. But I'm no sayin' the pictur' palace is disrespectable. Folk that like it say ti's elevatin'; folk that dinna like it say it's lowerin'. As a matter o' fac', it's partly the yin an' partly the ither. I wudna advise ye to gang, John, if I thought ye wud get demoralised."

"Oh, it wud tak' a queer lot to demoralise me," said the reputed oldest inhabitant, recklessly. "It's the wife I'm thinkin' o'. She's that easy affronted. I think I best gang wi'oot her the first time, an' see what it's like. Eh, Joseph?"

Mr. Redhorn hesitated to reply. Not for years had Mr. McNab gone to the town across the firth without his wife's escort. "I dinna think sich drastic measures are necessary," he said at last. "I'm sure Mistress McNab wud be offended at naething—I mean to say, there wud be naething to offend her. When I was there the place was chock-a-block wi' females."

"'Mphm!" Mr. McNab muttered, dubiously. "Still, the sensations micht frichten her."

"I wudna say yer wife was timid—for a female," said the painter, who was growing tired of the conversation.

"A' the same," the other persisted, "it's the best to be on the safe side. I'll gang to Gourock the first fine Seturday, an' ha'e a spy at the pictur' palace. Of course," he added, rather hurriedly, "ye'll no' mention ma plan to her, or onybody else, Joseph."

"Oh, I'll respec' yer confidence, John," Mr. Redhorn returned, good-humouredly. He was as certain as he was sure of anything in this world that the old man would never find an opportunity of leaving Fairport alone; and in all probability (he told himself) the whole matter would be forgotten by the following morning.

Nevertheless, the old man appeared to be in earnest. "Ye'll no' betray me?" he persisted anxiously.

"No' for a' the gold o' Crusoes!" declared the painter, yawning openly.

Just then there was a gentle tapping at the door. Old Mrs. McNab had come to take her man home.

* * * * *

Mrs. McNab was "washing up" after break-

fast the following Saturday, when her husband, seated at the hearth, said, in a casual, yet not very natural tone:

"It's a fine day—I think I'll tak' a trip to Gourock in the efternune."

"Ye'll what, John?"

"I'm sayin' I think I'll tak' a trip to Gourock in the efternune."

"What wud ye dae at Gourock?" she inquired, mildly enough.

"It's a lang while since I had a crack wi' Peter McTavish." It must not be supposed that Mr. McNab was in the habit of prevaricating—unless, perhaps, in the matter of his age. But now the spirit of adventure was driving him hard.

"The last time ye seen Peter McTavish, him an' you cast oot aboot some stupid politics, an' ye said ye wud never darken his door again."

"It's time we made it up."

Mrs. McNab finished the drying of a dish before she responded. "I canna gang wi' ye the day, John. The parlour's got to be cleaned afore nicht-time. I'll see if I canna manage next Seturday, or the next again."

Mr. McNab wriggled on his chair and cleared his throat. "I—I can gang to Gourock ma lane, Mary."

"Havers, man!"

"But I can so! Ye talk as if I was a wean."

"Noo, John, ye ken fine ye canna gang to Gourock yer lane—"

"An' what for no?"

"Because I wudna let ye gang yer lane!"

"See here, Mary," he cried, irritably, "I'm fair seeck o' yer hingin' on to ma coat tails! I canna move a fit but ye're hingin' there!"

She gazed at him in gentle amazement. "John, hoo mony years is it since ye gaed to Gourock yer lane?"

"That's naething to dae wi' it! I—I dinna mean to hurt yer feelin's, but—but—"

"I wud gang wi' ye the day if I could," she interrupted, without the slightest resentment. "Listen, John! I'll *promise* to gang wi' next Seturday. Will that no content ye?"

"I'll maybe no' want to gang next Seturday."

"Aw, ye're a contrairy auld man!" she rejoined, smiling. "Awa' oot to the garden an' sit in the sun this fine mornin'. We'll speak aboot it at dinner-time."

But at dinner-time he made no reference to the matter, and she was not sorry to think that he had forgotten all about it. The meal being over, he returned to the garden, to sit once more in the sun—so, at least, she presumed.

About three o'clock Mr. Redhorn, setting

forth for an after-dinner walk, encountered Mrs. McNab, worried and excited.

"I was comin' to see ye," she said. "Ha'e ye seen onything o' John?"

"No' the day, Mistress McNab. Was he comin' to see me?"

"He's awa' to Gourock!"

"Gourock!" exclaimed the painter with a sudden sense of dismay.

"Ay—an' him in his auld coat—no' even a clean collar to his neck! But I ken where to find him if I gang on the next boat—an' if naething has happened to him."

"Ye ken where to find him! Did he tell ye he was gaun to—Gourock?"

"He was speakin' aboot it this mornin'. But I tell't him I couldna gang wi' him, an' I promised to gang next Seturday—an' I thought that he would ha'e contented him. I never thought he wud treat me like this, efter three-an'-fifty year—efter the way I've ta'en care o' him. But a man's a man for a' that, as he used to sing it. I suppose it means that a man can never be onything better nor a man, if he lives for a hunderd years. But I thought John wud—"

"Dinna tak' it to heart like that," the painter softly interrupted. "I'm sure John didna mean to hurt yer feelin's. But ye—ye said ye kent where to find him?"

"He said he wanted to see a man, Peter McTavish."

"Oh! . . . Aweel, if ye ha'e nae objections, I'll come in the boat wi' ye."

"I'll be gled o' yer comp'ny, Maister Ridhorn. Ye've aye been a guid frien' to John."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head, wishing he had said less—or, better, nothing whatever—about picture palaces to the old man. He looked at his watch. "We ha'e twinty-five meenutes till the boat comes," he said, "so we'll jist step up to ma hoose an' ha'e a dish o' tea. I left a guid fire. Come awa', Mistress McNab. Keep up yer heart. We'll find yer guid man safe an' soun', or ma name's no' Joseph Ridhorn. An' I wud humbly implore ye no' to be severe wi' him. To err is human, etceetera."

* * * * *

An hour later they stood on Gourock pier. The painter was nervous.

"I ha'e a suggestion to offer," he said. "Tell me where to find John, an' I'll fetch him to ye in the waitin' room here. It—it micht gi'e him a scare if ye was drappin' on him like a bolt frae the blue, as it were."

"Ye're rael thoughtful for John," she returned, a trifle drily, perhaps. "But I canna quarrel wi' yer plan, for I wudna like to affront him afore Peter McTavish. She mentioned the address,

adding, "As quick's ye can, please, for I'm anxious."

"Ye'll no' be severe on him?"

"Was I ever severe on him?"

"I ask yer pardon," said Mr. Redhorn, and straightway departed.

Fortunately the picture palace was but a little way from the pier.

At the pay-box Mr. Redhorn made inquiry. "Ha'e ye seen a vera auld man—an extra auld man—an antiquarian, in fac'—enter these premises recently?"

The box-keeper admitted that an aged person had paid for admission about two hours ago.

"I want to see him," said the painter.

"Sixpence."

"Can I no' gang in wi'oot payin?"

"No, but you can pay without going in."

"I perceive, young man," said Mr. Redhorn, "that ye're better at quotin' nor thinkin'. Weel, here's yer saxpence. Kindly pull the string, or press the button, or whatever ye dae for a livin'."

Presently he found himself inside, and in darkness. An attendant informed him that the lights would go up in about five minutes. In that period of time Mr. Redhorn witnessed the attempted murder of a dazzlingly fair damsel by an exceedingly swarthy gentleman, the rescue of the former and confounding of the latter by a

noble-looking youth in an immaculate sailor suit, the suicide by slow poison of the swarthy one, and the bethrothal of the lovers.

On the theatre being illuminated he espied the object of his search not far away. Mr. McNab was rubbing his eyes. When the painter spoke to him he looked up in dazed fashion.

"Guidsakes! is it you, Joseph? What are ye daein' here?"

"Aw, I jist drapped in, thinkin' I micht find ye enjoyin' yersel'. But we'll get ootside noo—er, John?"

"But I ha'ena seen onything yet," the old man protested.

"Ye've been here for twa hours. Come; we'll get ootside."

Mr. McNab rose slowly. He was beginning to understand and to suspect. "Is—is She here, Joseph?" he whispered.

"No' exac'ly here, John. . . . She's at the pier, waitin' for us. We'll be in nice time to drink a gless o' ginger wine afore we catch the boat for Fairport."

"Did ye betray me, Joseph?"

"Na, na. When I left her at the pier I was to look for ye at McTavish's. She was sure ye had gaed there."

"Oh, dear me!" groaned Mr. McNab, and fell silent.

When they were in the street, the painter said,

softly: "I think ye best tell her aboot everything, John."

"I've naething to tell her aboot. I never seen onything."

"I dinna understand ye, John. What dae ye mean?"

"What I say. Ye tell me I was in the place for twa hours, an' I believe ye. Still, I never seen onything excep' a pictur' o' a lot o' seagulls—an' I can see plenty o' seagulls ony day at Fairport—an' the place was warm an' dark, an' I was kin o' wearit, an' I thought I wud shut ma e'en for twa meenutes, an'—Weel, the next thing I seen was yersel'. . . . Oh, man, if I was a wee thing younger, I wud gang up a close an' kick masel'. Saxpence for a bit nap! The dearest nap I ever had! Joseph, ha'e ye ony extra bad language?"

"Ma sympathy is nane the weaker for bein' dumb, John," replied the painter. "It was indeed, as ye observe, a costly nap. In some o' the new London hotels—see advertizements—ye wud likely ha'e got breakfast thrown in, an' maybe a bath into the bargain. . . . But what are we to say to the guidwife, John?"

"Oh, she'll jist ha'e to get the truth—what there is o' it. Maybe the nap was a judgment on me. I'm sorry I vexed her. . . . But—as I've said afore—a man maun ha'e his fling."

VI

A BID FOR FAME

"HEY! Hold on!" cried the apprentice so sharply that Mr. Redhorn dropped his brush and all but fell from the ladder.

Recovering his balance, the painter, with natural enough irritation, but with unwonted asperity, exclaimed: "What the mischief did ye yell like that for, laddie? I micht ha'e broke ma neck."

"I couldna help yellin' when I seen ye was for puttin' the wrang colour on the cornice."

"The wrang colour!" Mr. Redhorn looked down at the pot in his left hand, the pot with which he had mounted the ladder a minute previously. "Criftens!" he muttered, and proceeded to descend cautiously to the floor.

Arrived there, he set down the paint-pot and solemnly presented his apprentice with his hand.

"Wullie," he said to the astonished youth, "if ye risked ma neck, ye saved ma reputation. What wud Mistress Carvey ha'e said if I had

put sky-blue where she ordered sawmon-pink? Thenk ye, laddie—thenk ye!"

"Aw, it was naething," muttered Willie. "I jist didna want to see ye mak' a cod o' yersel'. A' the same, I dinna think ye could break yer neck fallin' that wee height."

"The human neck," said Mr. Redhorn seriously, "is easier broke nor ye seem to think, ma lad, an' I never was skilled at the acrobatics. I never yet fell wi'oot hurtin' masel' an' beholdin' a superabundance o' stars. At the same time, as previously observed, I'm grateful to ye for stayin' ma hand afore it could mak' a false step."

During these remarks Willie had lifted a pot, and now he offered it to his employer. "Here's the sawmon-pink, Maister Ridhorn, an' I'll whisper the next time instead o' yellin'."

But Mr. Redhorn shook his head, and motioned the pot away, saying:

"Na, Wullie, I'll leave the cornice till the morn's mornin', and meantime I'll help ye wi' the skirtin'-board." He consulted his watch. "Five o'clock. Ay! we'll manage to feenish the skirtin'-board afore we knock off."

"Are ye—are ye feared to gang up the ladder again?" the boy inquired.

"I am that," the painter replied with a sigh. "But it's ma reputation mair nor ma neck that

I'm feared for. The truth is, I'm no' in the humour for performin' delicate operations." He hesitated for a moment. "Maybe ye've noticed that something has been preyin' on ma mind the day, eh?"

"Is it yer dyspeepsia again?"

"I said ma *mind,* laddie. Maybe I should ha'e said ma intellec'."

"Ye've got me there," said Willie.

"Ye ha'ena noticed onything?"

Willie shook his head. "Has Danks, the fishmonger, been teasin' ye again?" he inquired, as with an after-thought.

"Na; it's no' Danks this time, though I daresay it'll no' be lang afore he'll be wantin' his revenge."

"Revenge?"

"Ay! For, ye see, I got the better o' him last nicht—and noo I wish I hadna. But this'll no' dae. Time's money to Miss Carvey, as weel as to Joseph Ridhorn. Get to work on the skirtin'-board, laddie."

For three minutes they painted diligently and in silence. Then Willie's curiosity got the better of him.

"What did ye dae to Danks last nicht?" he casually inquired.

"Pay attention to yer job," said Mr. Redhorn,

not very firmly, however. He was longing to confide in the only confidant he possessed.

Willie's ears detected the weakness in the command. "Come on; tell us, Maister Ridhorn," he said softly, persuasively. "What did ye dae to Danks?"

"Naething, direc'ly; but I could see he left the meetin' in a huff."

"What meetin'?"

"Pay attention to yer job." Mr. Redhorn dipped his brush, made a few strokes with it, gently scratched the tip of his nose with the point of the handle, and continued: "I suppose ye're aweer that Samuel M'Tavish, the Fairport polisman—or constable, as he prefers to be designated—has got promotion to the city?"

"Ay! he'll maybe get quit o' some o' his fat there. He's liker a hippopotamus nor a man—"

"Whisht, laddie! Dinna speak evil o' the departed—or, at ony rate, the aboot-to-be-departed. For a man that's had sae little to dae for ten year, Samuel's no' a bad chap. Onyway, it has been decided to compliment him wi' a presentation afore he departs, this day week. A commytee was formed some time back to gather funds, etceetera. The presentation will consist o' a purse o' twinty sovereigns in gold—"

"Gor!"

"—an' a clock, for he's getting married shortly."

"My! it's fine to be a slop!"

"That's an awfu' unseemly word, Wullie. A polisman's is an honourable profession, though it involves mair boots nor brains. Still, I've nae doobt Samuel'll need to use his heid for a' it's worth when he gets to the city."

"But what aboot Danks? Would he no' put onything in the purse?"

"Oh, Danks subscribed his share. Gi'e the man credit for that. But the meetin' last nicht wasna entirely feenancial. In fac', the chief business was to choose the party that wud mak' the presentation, likewise a speech. That was where the trouble commenced, Wullie. They didna choose Danks."

"Wha did they choose?"

"Me," said the painter sadly. "On' noo I wish it had been the other way. But I was kin' o' elevated last nicht."

"Eh?" Willie regarded his employer with increased interest.

"I'm sayin' I was kin' o' elevated. Ye see, the meetin' was in ma hoose, and I felt it ma duty to stan' the comp'ny a bottle o' ginger wine; an' what wi' the fumes o' the wine, as the poets say, an' the popular acclamations, I lost ma heid

for the time bein', and consented to mak' the presentation on Thursday, the third prox."

"When?"

"This day week. An' noo I'm sorry."

"But ye can draw back yet, and let Danks get the job."

"A Ridhorn never draws back," said the painter, adding under his breath, "espaycially when there's a Danks in the field."

"Is the polisman to get his purse an' clock in a field?" inquired Willie.

"Tits, laddie, I was speakin' metaphorically. The ceremony'll tak' place in the public hall, an' a' Fairport'll be there. An', as sure as death, I'll mak' a cod o' masel', and be the laughin'-stock o' Fairport, Danks included. Aweel, let it be a lesson to ye. See that ye never let yer vanity get the better o' yer sober judgment. Turn a deaf ear to popular applause, an' avoid—"

"I wudna drink ginger wine if I was payed for 't," said Willie. "But I'm sure," he added kindly, "ye can mak' as guid a speech as ony man in Fairport, Maister Ridhorn."

"On paper, Wullie, on paper—or, at ony rate, on the taiblets o' ma imagination," said Mr. Redhorn modestly. "That was another metaphor, ye wud observe. Oh, I wouldna shrink if it was merely a case o' composeetion—in fac', I think

I may say wi'oot ostentation"—he smacked his lips over the word—"that, barrin' the meenister, I would beat ony man in Fairport an' the viceenity at the game."

"My! ye're a demon for fancy words!"

Mr. Redhorn let the compliment pass. "*But,*" he went on sadly, "when it comes to gi'ein' an oral demonstration o' ma oratorical an' rhetororical abeelities—"

"Eh?"

"When it comes to openin' ma mooth for to emit the fruits o' ma lucubrations—"

Unfortunately at this point Willie permitted himself to snigger, and although he blew his nose almost simultaneously, Mr. Redhorn's suspicion was stirred.

"Pay attention to yer job," said the painter, "an' we'll work till ten meenutes past the hour the nicht."

"But I've got a footba' match the nicht!"

"In that case we'll start ten meenutes earlier the morn's mornin'. Noo proceed. Keep yer brush busy, an' gi'e yer tongue a rest."

Which was rather unjust of Mr. Redhorn, considering that he had been doing the most of the talking. He sought to make up for his sharpness later by inviting the boy to tea, and was honestly disappointed when Willie, who bore no ill-will, reminded him of the football match.

"I—I was thinkin' ye micht care to gi'e me a hand wi' the speech," he said diffidently, as they were about to part.

"Oh, weel, I'll see if I've time," said Willie carelessly.

In spite of his brave words, Mr. Redhorn discovered that even mere "composeetion" was not lightly to be achieved. At eight-thirty Willie found him groaning over a table littered with scraps of paper and cigarette ash.

"Ha'e ye no' had yer tea yet?" the apprentice inquired, after a glance round the untidy room.

Mr. Redhorn shook his head.

"Hoo mony ceegarettes ha'e ye smoked?"

"Dear knows," the painter wearily replied. "I thought they would maybe stimulate ma brain—"

"If ye wud smoke guid ceegarettes instead o' that rotten sort—"

"I've tell't ye afore, I canna afford to be a connisewer." Mr. Redhorn passed his hand over his scalp.

"Is yer heid hurtin' ye?"

"No' jist exactly hurtin' me, but I'm begginin' to understan' why so mony o' the world's greatest thinkers ha'e ended their days in the madhoose." He groaned, dipped his pen, and brought from the depths of the ink-pot a blob of sediment. "That," he said, regarding it bitterly, "is what

happens every time I'm seized wi' an aspiration."

Willie, having passed to the mentelpiece, missed the significance of the last remark. He now returned carrying a large bottle of medicinal appearance.

"Ye better drink a dose o' the Elixir, Maister Ridhorn."

"Tits, laddie, I've got nae dyspeepsia the noo. Ma trouble is mental—intellectual."

"An' that brings on the dyspeepsia later—ye've tell't me often."

"True! An' onyway, as wiser men nor me ha'e remarked, prevention is better nor cure. Gi'e me the bottle." Uncorking it, he lowered a goodly pull, much to the gratification of Willie, who never tired of seeing his employer take physic. "Aw, laddie, that's a terrible taste. Remove it! I've been absorbin' that Elixir for nine years, but if I was livin' to be a hundred, I doobt I wudna get to like it."

"But it's guid for ye," said Willie, returning the bottle to the mentelshelf. "I think I'll put the kettle on, and ye'll get a cup o' tea, eh?"

"Ye're a thoughtful laddie," the painter returned gratefully, cleaning his pen, and preparing to resume his task.

Presently, Willie, having mended the fire, which had burned low, rejoined him.

"Hoo are ye gettin' on, Maister Ridhorn?"

Mr. Redhorn sighed. "Ma brain feels burstin' wi' ideas, but as sure as I start to write them doon—feugh! they're awa'!"

"Ha'e ye nae notion o' what ye want to say?"

"Oh, I ken fine what I want to say," said the painter a trifle sharply. "The deeficulty is to command ma ideas. I think the best way'll be to begin wi' a synopsis—"

"What's that?"

"French. Ye'll see what it means immediately."

Mr. Redhorn laid a fresh scrap of paper before him, and cautiously dipped his pen. "For instance, we'll ha'e to speak o' the polisman's connection wi' Fairport, and the great respec' and esteem he enjoyed—"

"No' frae me!"

"Whisht, laddie! When a prominent man is leavin' the community for ony place excep' the jail, it's usual to mention 'respec' and esteem.' Then," the painter continued, "we wud need to refer to the absence o' serious crime durin' his residence here. I canna deny that ma remarks wud be mair pungent if he had nabbed a burglar, or detected a homicide, or performed a gallant deed o' some description—"

"He once got a motorist fined—an' d'ye mind

when he was for arrestin' a photographer for—"

"Oh, we'll no' refer to these incidents. We'll jist say he done his duty, an' then we'll congratulate him on his promotion to a wider sphere, which is tempered wi' unspeakable grief to think that his feet will never (D.V.) tread these hospitable shores again. That's the synopsis." Mr. Redhorn concluded with a wave of his pen and a long breath.

"My! ye're a demon at speeches!" cried Willie, in honest admiration.

"Ma mither aye wanted me to be a meenister," said the gratified painter; "but I couldna think to soar that high. Still, I'm gled ye approve o' the synopsis, Wullie, which, ye must understan', is merely the entrails o' the observations at present seethin' in ma brain. If I can jist manage to get a tenth part o' ma thoughts on to paper, an' a tenth part o' the result oot o' ma mooth, I promise ye I'll gi'e Fairport something to talk aboot for a month—or at least a week. I confess, laddie, yer kind words ha'e filled me wi' a new enthusiasm, an' I'll proceed wi' ma task in hope. Noo I hear the kettle singin', so we'll get oot the dishes preparatory to enjoyin' a dish o' tea."

"Strikes me," said Willie, "ye're feelin' the better of the Elixir."

"I'll no' deny it," returned Mr. Redhorn, rising briskly; "nor will I deny that I feel at this blessed meenute like a young lion—or an ostrich —I mean to say, an eagle—which has renewed its youth."

When Willie had recovered from a severe fit of coughing, he said:

"Maister Ridhorn—" and halted.

"What is it, laddie?"

"What d'ye think I was hearin' the nicht? I was for tellin' ye suner, but I forgot."

From the cupboard where he kept his provisions, Mr. Redhorn had taken a plate of butter. "What did ye hear?" he asked fearfully, and laid the plate of butter on the dresser.

"There's a reporter frae the *Greenhill Herald* comin' to the polisman's meetin' next week."

"A reporter! Great guidness!"

"He's some relation o' the polisman's. I suppose he'll be writin' doon yer speech for the paper, Maister Ridhorn."

For several seconds Mr. Redhorn remained absolutely motionless. Then he strode noiselessly to the door and turned the key. Then he walked over to the hearth, and stood there for a moment or two, gently stroking his drooping moustache. Then he stepped firmly across to the dresser, half-turned, and faced his staring apprentice.

"If this," he said, with emotion, raising his clenched fist, "if this isna fame, Wullie, it—it's dashed near it!" The clenched fist fell with a muffled thump.

"Oh, the butter!" yelled Willie.

The prospect of beholding his speech in print was as a spur to Mr. Redhorn's flagging ambition and faltering self-confidence. Yet a spur means pain no less than encouragement, and the painter's sufferings during the next six days—*and* nights—shall not be described in these pages.

It was about nine o'clock on the sixth evening that Mr. Redhorn made the announcement to Willie, who had several times fallen asleep in the easy-chair, of the completion of the great work.

"Gor!" said Willie, sitting up.

"Noo, in the first place," said the author, "is yer mither aware that ye're here the nicht?"

"Ay."

"Secondly, will she be alarmed if ye're no' hame afore nine-thirty?"

"No' her!" was the prompt reply.

"Then," said Mr. Redhorn, "seein' I've got to gang to Glesca the morn, to settle quarterly accounts, etceetera, I think I best read ye the speech noo. Accordin' to ma calculations, it'll tak' forty meenutes to deliver, an'—"

"Holy Moses!" the boy exclaimed involuntarily.

Mr. Redhorn permitted himself to smile. "Yer remark," he said, "suggests to me, Wullie, that I've composed a sermon; and I may say I'm no' wantin' in hope that ma speech contains sundry moral reflections. At the same time, it is aboundin', mair or less, in humour and innocent pleasantries. Moreover, it is rich in poetry. The poetry, hooever, is unoriginal."

"Is it?"

"But, on the whole, appropriate. Aweel, I'll begin—an' if there's onythirg ye dinna understan', kindly preserve inquiries till I come to 'finis.'"

"Could I get a drink o' water first?"

"Mercy, laddie, I clean forgot to inform ye o' the presence in thonder press o' a bottle o' leemonade, specially purchased for yer ain consumption. Help yersel', quick; but try no' to let the gas get the better o' ye durin' ma recital. I doobt I'll ha'e trouble enough tryin' to read ma ain deplorable penmanship, wi'oot ony exterior interruptions."

A minute later, tumbler in hand, Willie settled himself to listen. He had, during the past few days, hearkened to endless quotations from his employer's "notes," so that he did not expect to be vastly entertained. Nevertheless—so long,

at least, as his refreshment lasted—he gave his best attention to the somewhat stumbling "recital." And he sometimes managed to laugh or look grave at the right moment. Mr. Redhorn never raised his eyes from the pages except to rub them, while he mildly cursed his own bad writing.

At a quarter to ten the bulky manuscript fell from the fingers of the exhausted maker thereof.

"Splendid!" cried Willie. "Splendid!" He really could not think of anything else to say. He had long since decided not to ask any questions.

"I dinna think onybody'll deny," said Mr. Redhorn, wiping his streaming forehead, "that it's a *speech*."

"I'll knock the face off onybody that does," the apprentice declared.

"Ye're loyal, laddie, ye're loyal! But between you and me, I'm thinkin it's no hauf bad—eh?"

"It's splendid!" said Willie, checking a yawn.

"I jist wish I hadna to gang to Glesca the morn. I wud like fine if there had been time to mak' a fresh copy o' the speech. I'm feared I'll boggle at some o' the words that I've altered, an' loss ma heid." Mr. Redhorn began to look gloomy.

Willie had been given a holiday on the morrow,

and had planned to go fishing. But something impelled him to say:

"If ye like, I'll copy it for ye, an' ha'e it ready for ye when ye come hame at five o'clock."

"What! Ye wud dae that for me, Wullie? 'Deed, it wud mak' a' the difference in the world to me—an' ye're a grand writer, I ken."

"Ay, I'll dae it," said the boy, almost regretting his offer.

"Weel," the painter said, "it'll be a benefit that'll never be forgot. I'll bring ye the manuscript an' a supply o' paper afore I gang for the early boat, so as ye'll no' miss yer long lie. I dinna ken what to say to ye, laddie, but I'm gratefu'. An' noo I'm feared yer mither'll be anxious."

When, on the following evening, Mr. Redhorn stepped across the gangway, he was not surprised to see a strange policeman on the pier, for he was aware that the man had been in Fairport for several days, learning his way about under the guidance of Samuel M'Tavish. But he was surprised—nay, stricken with astonishment—when the piermaster, receiving his toll, remarked:

"We missed ye badly the day, Ridhorn."

"Eh?" exclaimed the painter, staring. Then

assuming that he was being chaffed, he gave a good-humoured laugh. "Weel, I hope the rest o' Fairport has survived ma absence as weel as you appear to ha'e done, Tammas."

"But it was a pity ye left wi' the early boat," the other said seriously; "for the news arrived at eight o'clock—as sune as the telegraph wire was open."

"Wh-what news?"

"I suppose I best tell ye the truth," the pier-master replied reluctantly, for he was a sympathetic soul. "Samuel M'Tavish got a wire frae heidquarters commandin' him to report hissel' at the Glesca office first thing the morn's mornin'. So he gaed off wi' the efternune boat. A great pity ye wasna here."

Mr. Redhorn cleared his throat. "Dae ye mean to say the polisman has left wi'oot receivin' his presentation?" he stammered.

"Oh, he got his presentation richt enough. Danks seen to that. Danks made the commytee call a public meetin' for twa o'clock. The folk turned oot weel; in fac', the hall was packed. Danks put hissel' in the chair, an' made the presentation, an' a speech forbye."

"Danks made a speech?"

"Aw! it wasna worth hearin', but I thought it was best to tell ye, Ridhorn."

There was a short pause, during which the

painter appeared to swallow something. Then he said, thickly, but gently: "I'm obleeged to ye, Tammas. Guid nicht!"

He made for his bachelor abode, avoiding several neighbours who would have spoken with him. He could not, however, avoid passing the fish-shop, in the doorway of which Danks, literally swollen with importance, was standing with some of his cronies.

With a great effort, the painter raised his head and murmured "Fine nicht!" though the rain was drizzling in melancholy fashion.

One of the cronies answered affably enough, but the others sniggered, and the fishmonger broke out with a sarcastic cackle, which followed Mr. Redhorn to his door.

He had left the key with his apprentice, whom he expected to find awaiting him at the fireside. But the door was locked, and no answer came to his knocking, until a neighbour appeared with the key and the explanation that the boy had left it in her charge some hours previously.

Mr. Redhorn entered, to find the fire out and neither message nor manuscript from his apprentice. He threw himself into the shabby easy-chair.

"Even Wullie'll be laughin' at me," he sighed bitterly.

Threatenings of a cold in the head caused him

to relight the fire and make a cup of tea. Thereafter he settled down to brood miserably, wrathfully, on the perfidy of the Glasgow police authorities, the triumph of Danks, the amusement of his neighbours, his own fatal conceit that had led to his dignity's downfall, and, last but not least, the foolish figure he must surely cut in the eyes of his apprentice.

Nine o'clock arrived, and the poor struggling hope that, in spite of all, Willie might turn up with a word of sympathy, died out. And as he once more called himself an old fool, a knock fell on the door, and a voice called cheerfully:

"It's me—Wullie!"

A moment later, he was admitted—dripping, mud-bespattered.

"Laddie, laddie, ye're drookit! Gang ower to the fire. I'll ha'e the kettle bilin' in nae time, an' ye'll drink a gless o' ginger-wine—hot—whether ye like it or no'. Man, I'm pleased to see ye!" Yet even as he uttered the last sentence Mr. Redhorn's heart flopped once more to the depths. "I suppose ye gaed to the fishin' efter a'," he said, trying not to speak coldly. "Weel, I suppose it was the best thing ye could ha'e done in the circumstances."

"Fishin'!" cried Willie, watching the steam rising from his garments. "I was busy wi' yer

speech till twa o'clock. An awfu' lot o' writin'! I had to get ma mither to dae a share."

"But—but, oh, laddie, did ye no' ken that the polisman got a wire an'—"

"Fine! But I thought it wud be a peety to waste the speech—"

"But it was wasted afore ye started to copy—"

Willie laughed and shook his head. "Na; it's no' wasted. I had it ready in time for the meetin', but, of course, the reporter wasna there, an' so I legged it to Greenhill."

"Greenhill?"

"I thought I wud gang an' see the man that has the weekly paper there. I was jist in time, for it comes oot the morn. He canna print a' yer speech, he says, but he's gaun to gi'e ye a column—"

"A column! Laddie, are ye tellin' me that a whole column o' ma speech is to be printed?"

"Jist that. The paper man said it was—splendid." Willie may be forgiven his suppression of the fact that the editor had muttered something like "screamingly funny" and choked a dozen times in the course of his perusal.

Mr. Redhorn sat slowly down, his hand to his head. "And ye've walked sixteen mile in this weather to dae that for me! Oh, Wullie, but ye're loyal!"

"It was a peety to waste it. Ye've burst Danks this time, eh?"

"Criftens!" cried the painter. "I had clean forgot aboot Danks. He—he'll be furious. I hope ye explained to the paper man that Danks was in the chair."

"Oh, the paper man's gaun to put in the paper that Danks said a few words," said Willie carelessly. "Danks canna speak for nuts. I heard him. It was like a moose squeakin'. Gor! I wud like to see his face when he gets the paper the morn's nicht. The paper man's gaun to send ye a dizzen copies, free."

Just then the kettle boiled over, and Mr. Redhorn, curbing his excitement, hastened to concoct the hot drink for his guest.

" 'Deed, I think I'll ha'e a gless masel', he said suddenly; "for if this isna fame, it's dashed—" He paused. "It's kin' o' rough on Danks, too," he muttered thoughtfully. "Weel, weel, as ye grow aulder, Wullie, ye'll learn that every fly has its ointment."

VII

"THE WEE DUG"

BUSINESS was slack, and Mr. Redhorn, egged on by his apprentice, had almost decided to apply his professional energies and talents to the beautifying of his own abode.

"I've been intendin' to dae it for quarter o' a century," he said, in reply to one of the boy's questions. "Stric'ly speakin', it's ma landlord's affair, but the man has aye been that hard up that I've never had the face to mention the subjec' to him. It near ruined him when the frost brustit the upstairs pipes, fifteen year back, an' flooded his entire property."

"But what way did ye no' jist dae it yersel'? It's no' a big job."

"*Pro*crastination, Wullie, *pro*crastination. An' it wasna the pentin' and paperin', that I dreaded; it was the necessary preparations for the same—the clearin' o' shelfs, an' presses, an' cupboards, an' corners. I like thoroughness. But when I meditated on the accumulations o' years, an' the dust o' ages, as the poet says, I—weel, I *pro*-crastinated."

"Ye funked it?"

"Put it that way if ye like. If ye want a sma' example o' the accumulations afore mentioned, get up an' open the wee doors ablow the dresser—bearin' in mind that this has been ma hame for near thirty year."

Willie left his seat by the hearth, and opened the first of the three doors.

"What dae ye behold?" said Mr. Redhorn.

"Penny novels—aboot ten thoosan' o' them. What for dae ye keep them?"

"Dear knows. At the present time I'm askin' masel' what for I've kep' ony o' the miscellaneous trash that'll ha'e to be shifted afore we can get to work. Maybe it's because I'm a single man. Maybe I've hoarded rubbish because I've never had onything worth the hoardin'. Try the next door. I think ye'll find mair variety there. If there's onything ye think worth while the annexin', help yersel." Mr. Redhorn dropped back in his chair, and lit a cigarette of the worst possible quality.

Presently the apprentice put the question: "What dae ye keep this for?"

"What?" said the painter, lazily. Then he sat up.

The boy was holding out a heavy piece of white earthenware, very dusty, on which was printed in thick black letters the word

DOG.

"Did ye once keep a dog, Maister Ridhorn?"

"I did," slowly the man answered, and quickly added, *"pro tem."*

"What kin' o' dug was it?"

"If ye've ony use for the dish," said Mr. Redhorn, as though he had not heard, "ye can tak' it hame wi' ye. I've never used it—I mean to say, it's never been used." He got up, crossed the floor, and began to rummage in a drawer. "There was a collar, likewise, that was never used. Oh, here it is! Ye'll maybe get a dug to fit it some o' these days. It's got ma name on it, but the plate could easy be changed. There ye are!"

"Thenk ye. . . . When was it ye had the dug, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Afore your time." The reply was curt, and perhaps the man realized as much, for he added kindly, "I'll maybe tell ye aboot ma—the wee dug anither day, Wullie, though it's no' a story worth the tellin'."

* * * * *

Perhaps not—as Joseph Redhorn would have *told* it. But as Joseph Redhorn *knew* it?—well, it is for the reader to say.

"Afore your time," he had said to his apprentice, and the precise date is immaterial.

The thing happened in the blackest hour of

Mr. Redhorn's life—at the blackest moment of that hour. Any grown-up person in Fairport could have told you how once, for a period of years, the painter, apart from his day's work, had appeared to be a confirmed recluse, and such a person could also, doubtless, have proffered theories to account for this choice of solitude. The simple facts are these: Joseph had always been too shy to be what is commonly termed sociable, and when he first shut himself up, the neighbours made no attempt to disturb him. He shut himself up to begin with because he had fallen into a most miserable state of health; he continued to shut himself up because in his natural melancholy and loneliness he allowed his bodily wretchedness to become spiritual. Simply that and nothing more—but that is a great deal. Other men besides Joseph Redhorn have in such wise been pressed to the verge—and over.

It was one of those nights which we may call —according to our mood—late autumn or early winter. A tempest of wind and rain raged over the loch. Doors and windows rattled, chimney-cans toppled, slates and tiles hurtled from the village roofs. Fairport, save one man, was abed, for the hour was late, yet Fairport for the greater part was awake, quaking.

Joseph Redhorn was the one man not abed, yet to all appearances he had been sleeping for hours.

He sat at his kitchen table, his head in his arms. Behind him was a dead fire, on his left a window, which each blattering gust threatened to burst in, on his right the door which he was shortly going to open—for the last time.

The clock wheezed, and slowly, loudly, fatally, told out midnight. A little later, Joseph Redhorn rose stiffly. His face was ghastly in the lamplight; his pale blue eyes were glazed and strange. He wiped his wet brow, muttering—

"God, it's nae use. I couldna thole anither day. . . . There'll be naebody aboot noo. . . . I'll mak' an end—A man that doesna matter to onybody—doesna matter to onybody." He crossed to the door, steadily enough, and automatically took his hat from the peg. The house shook; he appeared unconscious of any storm. He turned the key. With his fingers on the handle he looked back.

"Na, na. No' anither day, no' anither nicht, Almighty God, I couldna thole it—doesna matter to onybody."

He opened the door and peered into the roaring blackness. He heard the sound of many waters. A white thing brushed over his feet. He reeled and recovered his balance, and looked downwards.

A little fox-terrier was crouching there, whining, looking up imploringly.

"A wee dug," he murmured weakly, staring, "a wee dug. Lost—like masel'."

At the softness of his voice the terrier rose, placing its forepaws against his knee.

"Puir beastie!" He bent and patted its head, stroked its back. "Ye've got terrible wat an' dirty, wee dug. But I've got to gang awa'. What am I to dae wi' ye?"

The terrier licked the back of his hand.

And something happened to Joseph Redhorn. Leaning against the wall, he put his hands to his face. "Ma God, ma God!" he sobbed.

Presently he closed and locked the door, and signing to the terrier to follow him, went over to the hearth and sat down in his easy-chair. The terrier squatted on the ragged rug, shivering painfully, and gazed up in his face expectantly.

"Ye're cauld—perishin'," he said unsteadily, for he also was shivering. "An' ye'll be hungry." He got up and fetched some biscuits, broke them, and began to feed his visitor. "Ye're fair starvin'! I think I best licht the fire."

Within three minutes, thanks to a plentiful supply of wood drenched with paraffin, he had a glorious blaze, upon which he threw coal.

"Wee dug, ye've surely had a lang, weary journey," he said, for the terrier had collapsed upon its side before the warmth. "I wonder if ye wud bite me if I was to gi'e ye a warm bath.

Wud ye bite me? Even so, I'll try the bath. Ye're that cauld an' dirty."

The terrier made no attempt to bite him while he washed it in his own tin basin. It licked his face while he dried it with a warm towel. It appeared to be refreshed, for it followed him briskly when he went to forage for a scrap of meat and a drop of milk. . . .

From the easy-chair the man watched it eat its fill. When it was satisfied he said—

"I wonder what they ca' ye, wee dug. There's naething on yer collar but 'Marlow, Harrington Hoose'—an' Marlow's no' the name o' a dug, an' there's nae Harrington Hoose within ten miles o' Fairport. What's yer name, wee dug?"

The terrier, cocking its ears, looked as if it would fain have told him; then, unexpectedly, it sprang upon his knees.

"Oh, ye're fine an' cosy noo," he said, stroking the smooth hair. "I suppose I'll ha'e to see the polisman aboot ye in the mornin'."

An hour later he procured an old blanket, wrapped his guest in it, and laid the bundle before the fire, which he replenished.

How he himself passed the remainder of that wild night is not to be set down here.

In the morning he approached the village constable, who promised to make inquiries and do all things possible in order to discover the owner.

"Can I get keepin' it in the meantime?" the painter asked rather anxiously. "I dinna ken a thing aboot dugs."

"Same here—except that I ken this yin's a 'she' an' no' an 'it.' Ye should speak to Mason, the grocer."

So the painter went diffidently to the grocer, an old man who once or twice in the past had asked him to supper.

"A bonny wee thing—no lang since she was a pup," said the grocer. "If I was you," he added, smiling, "I wud be prayin' for an accident to the owner."

"Maybe I am," said Joseph, and was surprised by his own words.

The terrier evinced much distress when he made to tie her up before going to his work. Fortunately his work was out-of-doors that day, a calm having followed the storm, and he decided to take her with him. Going and returning he met neighbours who seemed interested in his new comrade; the "doggy" ones stopped to ask questions, or to praise the creature's "points," and they also gave advice. They said she was a valuable one, but Joseph did not need to be told that.

By evening he was in a curiously excited state of mind. In those twelve hours he had spoken socially with more people than in the past twelve

months. All the same, he spent a dreadful night with himself. But the next night was not quite so bad, and the next again was almost tolerable.

On the fourth night from the coming of the "wee dug" he enjoyed the best rest he had had for many a long month. He wakened but once, and it was not an unhappy wakening. He was disturbed by a tugging at the bedclothes.

"Eh, what's that? . . . Oh, it's yersel', is it? What are ye wantin', wee dug?" He reached down his hand in the dark, and felt the comforting lick. Then the terrier made springs at the edge of the bed. "Was ye wantin' up? Was ye feelin' lanesome? Come then!" He drew her up to him. She nestled against him, licking his face.

"Oh, wee dug," he whispered, "ye've surely got a soul, for it's only the things wi' souls that feel lanesome."

On the fifth and following nights she slept on the bed. Joseph continued to rest well, but his days were unsettled by hopes and fears—hopes that the owner might never turn up, fears lest he should arrive at any moment. And he discovered that these hopes and fears were sympathetically shared by quite a number of his neighbours.

Daily he held a consultation with the policeman. On the tenth morning the policeman said—

"I'm thinkin' she's yours, but wait ither three days in case onything comes o' that advertisement in the weekly paper."

Three days later—"Is she mine noo?" the painter asked in little more than a whisper.

"Wha's is she?" the other laughed.

"But—legally?"

The constable scratched his head. "If I had her, she would be mine's," he said at last. "An' I wud get a new collar for her."

The same afternoon Joseph Redhorn took boat for the town across the firth.

In the early evening he returned. On his way from pier to house he spoke a word to nearly every person he met—but only a word, for he was in a great hurry.

The terrier greeted him ecstatically. He sat down, wiping his eyes.

"Wee dug," he said, "yer mine's noo. Come an' see if yer new collar fits. An' see the bonny dish I've got for ye to drink at. Noo, nane o' yer fun! Be sober for a meenute, for I want to get off that ugly auld collar. Come here, ye wee rascal!—ma wee dug!—"

Without warning the door opened. The constable looked in.

"Ridhorn," he said, thickly, "it's hellish—but a lady has come for yer wee dug."

It is doubtful if he understood the explana-

tion of the beautiful lady in the costly furs, or if he noticed the great car with the pale gentleman in the tonneau. They belonged to a distant town. A fortnight ago they had been motoring through the district. During a stoppage some miles south of Fairport, the terrier has disappeared, unnoticed. Many miles north of Fairport they had met with an accident. The gentleman had been seriously injured. The terrier had been forgotten at first then advertised for—and so on and so on. . . . What did it all matter to Joseph Redhorn? His "wee dug" was in the beautiful lady's arms and she was calling it "Judy darling." It seemed to know her, yet cried piteously to its late protector. . . .

The beautiful lady had said all that a lady need say in the way of gratitude, and now she fumbled at a golden bag.

Ere she could open it, Joseph's hand made a pushing-away motion. "I've been paid," he said in a strange voice. "Ye'll excuse me." And, turning, he entered his house and shut the door.

At the end of an hour he opened it to find the old grocer on his step.

"I jist cam' to say, Ridhorn, that if ye was wantin' it, I could get ye a nice wee dug."

"It—it's rale kind o' ye," said the painter, after a little while, "but it wud never be the same."

The old grocer hesitated. "Weel, I can understan' ye feelin' that way, so I'll no' say ony mair aboot it. But noo the wife an' me wud like ye to come an' tak' a bite o' supper. It's ready, waitin' for us. Will ye come?"

Joseph was about to refuse, when something welled up in his heart. "God bless ye," he said suddenly; "I will."

* * * * *

After Willie had gone away with the dish and collar and sundry articles he had fancied, Mr. Redhorn sat still in the gathering dusk. And at last he spoke—very softly:

"Wee dug, ye're no' to think I forgot ye because I gi'ed awa' the things ye never used. If ye had used them, they wudna ha'e been laid by wi' the rubbish—no' likely, wee dug! . . . ma wee dug!"

VIII

FIVE AND THIRTY SHILLINGS

MR. REDHORN lay back in his shabby chair, his eyes half-closed, his left palm pressed upon his scalp. His long, sad nose looked even longer and sadder, his moustache drooped more despondingly, than usual. At brief intervals he heaved a hopeless sigh.

On the opposite side of the hearth sat his apprentice, Willie McWattie, whom he had invited that evening to tea and a game of draughts. Strangely enough, the restless, fun-loving boy had of late become a devotee of the sober game—much to his employer's gratification. Yet tonight, though the meal was over half an hour ago, Mr. Redhorn seemed to have forgotten all about draughts. During tea he had glanced at an evening paper, groaned, ceased eating, and relapsed into a silence that had remained almost unbroken until now. Willie was not unaccustomed to his employer's fits of moodiness—indeed, they had been fairly frequent during the past two months—but the prolongation of the present spell

was becoming too much for his patience. He shuffled his feet softly, cleared his throat, and remarked:

"It's gettin' near the New Year."

The clock ticked a dozen times ere Mr. Redhorn signified that he had heard.

"Ay," he breathed heavily. "As ye say, Wullie, it's gettin' near the New Year—a season o' gloomy reflections an' dire forebodin's. Ay!" His hand slid down and rested on his nose, covering his eyes.

There was a pause, and then Willie inquired sympathetically:

"Is't the chilblains or the dyspeepsia, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Both," was the curt reply. "But ye needna think *they're* the cause o' the reflections an' forebodin's. Ma pheesical afflictions are ill to bear, laddie," the painter continued in something like his own kindly voice, "but they're naething to the mental species, or variety, that I've got to endure—chiefly through ma ain foolishness," he added with a groan.

"But what's up?" the boy asked with anxiety.

Mr. Redhorn uncovered his face. He smiled with exceeding bitterness.

"It's no' so much what's up as what's doon," he said, and allowed his apprentice to look blank for fifteen seconds or so. "Maybe," he resumed,

"I betrayed ma emotion in the midst o' ma tea the nicht. Did ye notice onything when I was lookin' at the paper?"

"Ay; ye grunted as if something was hurtin' ye. But I thought it wud jist be the chalblains on yer toes."

"Weel, ye thought wrang," said Mr. Redhorn, with asperity. "I've a guid mind to keep ma trouble to masel', but they say confession's guid for the soul—"

"Ha'e ye got them on yer sole, forbye?"

"Haud yer tongue, laddie! I'm no' referrin' to chilblains at a'. I tell't ye ma affliction was mental. Ma emotion on lookin' at the paper the nicht was due to the fac' that Jingoes is doon anither eighteenpence. Of course that statement conveys naething whatever to you."

"I'm sure I dinna ken what ye're gas—speakin' aboot," said Willie, a little irritably. "Ha'e ye been bettin' on horses?"

"*What!*" Mr. Redhorn sat up.

"Weel," said Willie, abashed, "that's what they're sayin' aboot ye in Fairport."

"Wha's sayin' it? Wha dares to say that aboot me?"

"Danks, the fishmonger, an'—an' everybody."

Mr. Redhorn gasped. "An' dae *you* think I'm bettin' on horses, Wullie McWattie? I'm sure

I've tell't ye a score o' times that I wud as sune put masel' as ma siller on a horse!"

"Ay, but ye see—ye see, ye buy a paper every nicht. Ye've been buyin' a paper every nicht for a while back."

Mr. Redhorn recoiled; he smote his forehead. "This," he groaned, "this is redistribution—I mean retribution! Ma character forbye ma money is gone—completely went!"

"But if ye ha'ena been bettin' on horses, Maister Ridhorn," said the boy, "I'll sune let Danks an' the rest ken they're tellin' falsehoods. An' even if ye had been tryin' yer luck, I wud sune let them see—"

"Whisht, laddie—I ken ye're loyal, but—"

"I'll gang noo an' tell Danks—"

"Na, na!" the painter cried hastily. "Let well alone—nae matter hoo bad it is. In this case the truth isna muckle better nor what they imagine aboot me. Hoo am I to explain it to ye?" Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose.

"What's Jingoes, onyway?" Willie inquired.

"Jingoes," the painter replied sadly, "is ile—at least, it's an ile comp'ny, leemited. I'm no' sure where it gets the ile—if ony; but I've got fifty shares in it that cost me fifty pound odds. That's Jingoes!"

"Aw," murmured Willie, apparently not deeply impressed.

Mr. Redhorn looked disappointed. "I suppose ye dinna ken what a share is—an' I hope, for yer ain sake, ye never will," he said. "But seein' I've been suspected o' bettin' on horses, it's up to me, as the French says—in their ain tongue, of course—to inform ye o' the true state o' affairs. D'ye see?"

"Ay, I see," Willie answered, dubiously. "But are ye no' for a game at the draughts the nicht, Maister Ridhorn?"

"The draughts ha'e to wait. But, of course, if ye dinna want to hear the truth—if ye're no' interested in ma woe—"

"Ay; I want to hear aboot it," said Willie, with forced eagerness.

"Aweel, I'll unbosom masel', as it were. . . . Noo, pay attention! If ye dinna aye understan' what I'm sayin', preserve yer queries till I've concluded ma remarks. In the first place—weel, I wud maybe be the better o' a dose o' the Elixir." Having risen and helped himself from the physic bottle on the mentelpiece, he resumed his seat with a very wry face. "In the first place, Wullie—"

"Ye're at the second place noo."

"I'm what?"

"The Elixir was in the first place."

"Tits, laddie! The Elixir was merely an aside, as William Shakespeare says. In the first place,

I'm prepared to sweer that previous to the present I never bought a share in ony concern—I'm prepared to tak' ma solemn oath—"

"I believe ye."

"It isna necessary to interrup' me. I was aboot to say—in ony concern excep' a burial society that gaed bankrupt shortly efter obtainin' ma cash. Ye micht think that wud be a lesson to me, but it wasna." Mr. Redhorn heaved a heavy sigh. "The years passed by, an' on the first Seturday in October o' this rotten year I payed ma quarterly veesit to Glesca. As is ma custom, I called on McCorkindale, the ile an' colour merchant, to pay ma account, an' to complain o' the scandalous prices he had been chargin' me for linseed. His sole excuse was that ile was high an' still risin'. Then he changed the subjec', as was maybe nateral, an' we had some conversation entirely irreverent to the pentin' trade, an' consumed a ceegarette apiece. I was for makin' ma exit, so to speak, when he gi'es a bit laugh an' says, says he: 'Ridhorn, dae ye never try a flutter?' I thought he was for takin' a rise oot o' me, an' I retorted in these words: 'Maister McCorkindale, dae I look like a man that wud risk his neck on an airy-plane?' "

"Ye had him there," observed Willie, who was getting tired of saying nothing.

"Weel, I thought I had—but I hadna. It appeared that I had misconstrued him. Accordin' to Maister McCorkindale, the word 'flutter' means a speculation—which is jist aboot as safe a game as the thing I thought it was. Then it further appeared that ile shares was boomin', as they say, on the Stock Exchange, an' was likely to conteenue the performance for anither five year or so. Then Maister McCorkindale tell't me a lang story aboot Jingoe shares bein' the best in the market. They hadna commenced boomin' then, but they was expected to commence at ony moment. 'Buy Jingoes,' says he, 'an ye'll never regret it!' 'By Jingo,' says I, 'I'll eat ma hat first!'"

"Weel, ye had him that time, onyway," remarked the apprentice, checking a yawn.

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "Wud ye believe me, Wullie, the man persuaded me agin ma better judgment! It took time, but he done it! The next I knew was him introducin' me to a stockbroker, a weel-set-up young man wi' a pleasin' smile, an' lovely collar an' cuffs, an' a scent o' breath-perfumers at a penny per ounce, an' a gorgeously app'inted office. He stood me a ceegarette wi' a gold neb to it, an' was extremely affable. He kenned a' aboot Fairport, for he had once passed it in his yacht, three year back. An' so we cam' to business.—Wullie,

there's a bottle o' leemonade in the press. Help yersel'."

"Thenk ye," said Willie, obeying with alacrity. "An' what happened then, Maister Ridhorn?"

"The worst!" sighed the painter. "It appeared that Jingoes was then standin' aboot par—par bein' the price a share's supposed to be worth, bar accidents, which is frequent. In this case par was a pound sterlin'. The upshot was that I said I wud buy fifty. At that the stockbroker says to the telephone: 'Buy fifty Jingoes.' . . . An' it done it! Fifty Jingoes at twinty shillin's an' fowerpence-ha'penny per Jingoe! I was gettin' oot a cheque when the stockbroker said it wasna necessary, an' McCorkindale said I didna need to pay onything unless Jingoes gaed doon—fancy him sayin' that, efter assurin' me they was gaun up! But I wasna gaun in for ony hanky-panky, an' I drew the cheque, an' got a receipt, an' cam' awa'. Mind ye, I was neither vexed nor ashamed at the time. I was puffed up wi' importance an cupeedity; an' if I hadna had to run for the train I wud ha'e bought masel' a new necktie." Mr. Redhorn paused.

"Was that the end?" inquired Willie, resuming his seat, glass in hand.

"The end? Ye mean the beginnin'?"

"But what did ye get for yer money?"

"A month rolled on," said the painter heavily,

"an' then I got what they ca' a certeeficate. I confess it was a work o' art, beautifully printed on the sort o' paper ye buy butter in. I'll maybe let ye see it some day. Meantime I canna endure the sicht o' it. Even since I bought the shares, they've been ablow par—an' so ha'e I. An' noo they're doon to fifteen shillin's, or thereabouts. If I was sellin' them noo, I wud drap twelve pound, ten. But if I dinna sell them I'll maybe loss ma fifty pound. On the ither hand, McCorkindale says their time's comin', an', if I haud on, I'll mak' a hunderd pound profit. My! it's an awfu' quandary to be in, laddie. I canna sleep at nicht for thinkin' o' it. Chilblains an' dyspeepsia are naething to shares. . . . If I could jist get back the money I paid for them!"

"If I was you," said Willie, who had gained but the vaguest notion of what his employer was talking about, "I wud ha'e a try for a hunderd pound."

"If I made a hunderd pound," said the painter, "I wud never again be able to look ma conscience in the face. For, ye see, I've aye been doon on gamblin' in ony shape or form. An' if that wudna be gamblin', I dinna ken what gamblin' is."

"But what did ye buy the Jingoes for?"

"Weel, to tell ye the honest truth, Wullie—for it's nae excuse to say I lost ma heid—I thought

if I could mak' twinty pound off the Jingoes, it wud pay for the bad debt that a certain gentleman let me in for at the beginnin' o' the year. Moreover, it's been a rotten bad year, takin' it a' roun': naething but petty jobs, an' no' enough o' them. Trade's been poorer nor I can mind. But I shouldna ha'e let masel' be tempted; an' if I loss ma money noo, it'll be neither mair nor less nor just retribution."

Willie paused in the act of raising the tumbler to his lips. "I wud like fine to see ye mak' a hunderd pound, Maister Ridhorn," he said.

Mr. Redhorn put up his hand. "Whisht, laddie! Forget what I've tell't ye. I had to tell somebody, an' it seemed there was naebody but you. . . . Fetch the draughts."

Whether or not Mr. Redhorn's confession benefited his soul, it did not appear to have any improving effect on his spirits. As the days passed he became more melancholy, more irritable, and, what chiefly disturbed the mind of his apprentice, more given to long fits of silence. Hitherto his afflictions—mental or "pheesical"—had by no means rendered him mute; on the contrary, he had been often ready to discuss them, and not without a certain dry humour, which Willie rather enjoyed, though he did not always catch the full significance thereof. At all

events, the boy preferred any conversation to none, and the day's work in company with his elderly employer became a dull business. Only once did he venture to refer to Jingoes, and then Mr. Redhorn cut him short, requesting him to forget forthwith that such things existed in this unhappy world, or words to that effect. And there were no more invitations to tea or a game of draughts. It is to the credit of Willie McWattie that he nourished no resentment. Youth does not, as a rule, dwell upon the memories of past benefits, and it is highly doubtful whether Willie gave a minute's reflection to the many kindnesses, numerous pardons, and all the patient treatment received of his master during his apprenticeship. But he did feel sorry for his master, and was ready to champion the latter's name and fame against the whole of Fairport, if necessary.

As for Mr. Redhorn's depression, it was far from being entirely due to the depression of Jingoes. To lose money was as little agreeable to the painter as it is to most men, but to lose reputation was a still more serious calamity. The thought of his neighbours regarding him as a "sportsman" rankled horribly. He might just as well, he acknowledged bitterly to himself, have put his money on horses; he deserved the worst his neighbours could say of him. More-

over, he was plagued by a suspicion that he had been "done"—or "diddled," as he would have expressed it; and perhaps it was this that accounted for his irritability, for hitherto he had rather flattered himself on his discretion in matters of finance.

But the most depressing thoughts of all had to do with his apprentice. He wished most fervently that he had never confided in Willie, not that he dreaded betrayal of his secret, but simply because he was quite sure that Willie must despise him for a fool and a hypocrite. For while Joseph desired to stand well in the eyes of the public—*i. e.* the inhabitants of the village and its vicinity—he prized above all things the respect and regard of his apprentice. And during those dismal days he got into the way of stealing furtive wistful glances at the boy's face, compressing his lips and shaking his head, telling himself that Willie was now "workin' for wages an' naething else."

He stopped purchasing the evening paper—and almost immediately, thanks to Mr. Danks and his cronies, Fairport was browsing on rumours of varied plausibility, but all to the effect, that Redhorn, the painter, had "burst hissel' on horses" and was on the verge of financial ruin. Needless to say, the gossip reached Willie's ears; indeed, a youthful acquaintance went so

far as to warn Willie that he might soon be "out of a job." Willie's indignation was great, yet not equal to his anxiety on his master's account. The punch which the youthful acquaintance promptly received upon his nose was but half-hearted, and the fight that followed was perfunctory so far as Willie was concerned; he merely defended himself until his opponent was tired out, and then went off to bathe a cut lip.

"But what was it aboot?" Mr. Redhorn inquired that afternoon, speaking for almost the first time that day.

"Naething," the boy replied, more curtly than he intended.

There was a pause ere Mr. Redhorn said sadly: "Ye ken I dinna like ye fightin', Wullie. . . . But I suppose it's no' ma' place to interfere wi' ye in ony way."

For the better part of a week Mr. Redhorn did without a newspaper. He purchased a supply of penny novelettes. For many years—until his introduction to Jingoes—he had spent most of his lonely evenings in the perusal of such works. But now the heroines had lost their charm, the villains their thrill. For four nights he persevered with the pleasure that had become a task. On the fifth evening, in a storm of wind and rain, he set out for Kilmabeg, the next vil-

lage, about three miles distant. He arrived there to find the shop of the only newsagent locked up and shuttered. He came home drenched to the skin.

Mr. Redhorn was wont to describe a cold in the head as "the shupreme acme o' meesery." In his case it was certainly always a serious affair. Within twenty-four hours he was prostrated. He sent word to his apprentice, bidding him enjoy three idle days, and himself prepared for strict seclusion from his fellow-creatures for a like period. Huddled in his chair in front of the fire, the unhappy man denied himself to all comers, including Mr. Danks, who, it is to be feared, called less out of sympathy than curiosity.

The refusal of admittance roused the fishmonger's worst suspicions, and within an hour Fairport was whispering that the painter was already bankrupt and merely feigning illness because he was ashamed to appear.

There was a discreet tapping at the door.

Mr. Redhorn moved impatiently in his chair, but did not answer.

The tapping was repeated several times.

"Wha's there?" the invalid at last demanded crossly.

"Me."

"Wullie?"

"Ay."

"Aweel, I canna let ye in the nicht."

A pause.

"Please let me in, Maister Ridhorn."

"What dae ye want?"

"I—I've a message for ye."

"I canna attend to business the noo."

"It's no' business. Please let me in."

"Come the morn, Wullie. . . . I'm no' fit to speak to ye the nicht—I'm no' fit for human consumption."

Another pause.

"Maister Ridhorn."

"Weel, what is't?"

"If—if ye dinna let me in, I'll bide here a' nicht—an' it's freezin' hard."

At that Mr. Redhorn rose.

"Is't important, laddie?"

"Ay—terrible!"

Mr. Redhorn opened the door. "Come in—quick." He sneezed violently. "Are ye no' feart ye get the cauld frae me?"

"Na. . . . Ma mither was bakin', an' she sent ye some treacle scones." The boy laid a parcel on the table. His eyes avoided his employer. Perhaps he didn't want to laugh. Mr. Redhorn, muffled in an old overcoat and shawl, with a red woollen nightcap on his head, was a grotesque enough object.

"I'm greatly obleeged to yer mither," said the painter gently. "Why did ye no' say it was a message frae her?"

"It wasna the only message," replied Willie, his eyes on the floor.

"Aweel, ye best sit doon," Mr. Redhorn said, pointing to a chair. "Ye'll excuse ma present condeetion o' meesery. I'm sorry I've nae lee-monade on the premises." He sighed, and dropped into his seat. "Draw yer chair to the fire."

Willie did so, still avoiding his host's glances.

"Hoo's yer cauld?" he inquired.

"It'll be worse afore it's better. But it's only yin o' ma troubles."

"Ye'll be feelin' yer chilblains?"

"Ay. . . On the whole, laddie, I'm feelin' ripe for the tomb. An'—an' ma heart's as heavy as ma heid. . . . But ye said ye had a message. Wha frae?"

The boy reddened. "Me," he said at last, lookingly desperately uncomfortable.

"You?"

"Ay."

The painter seemed to shrink in his chair. "Ha'e ye—ha'e ye come to tell me ye want to leave me?" he asked huskily.

"Leave ye!"

"Leave ma employment. Ye're no' bound to me in ony way—"

"I dinna ken what ye're talkin' aboot," said Willie, regarding his host for the first time. Then —"Dae ye want me to leave?" he cried in great anxiety.

"Na, na, laddie," Mr. Redhorn replied hurriedly, turning away to conceal his relief. "I merely meant. . . . Weel, I'll say nae mair aboot it." He smiled feebly. "I'm afraid I've been broodin' in solitude till I ha'e got stupid notions in ma heid. . . . But I'm ready to hear yer message."

Once more the boy became ill at ease.

"I'm listenin'," said the painter encouragingly. "Speak up."

Willie wet his lips. "I—I bought a paper the nicht," he said in a low voice. "An' I seen yer Jingoes priced at three-ha'pence. I—I was vexed for ye." He did not mention what a puzzle the financial columns had been to him. "I hope ye're no offended wi' me for buyin' the paper," he went on, his courage failing at the silence of the other. "I—I was kin' o' anxious for ye. I've got five—"

"Three-ha'pence!" gasped Mr. Redhorn. "Aweel"—bitterly, "it's as much as I deserved."

Willie looked up. "Did ye no' ken?"

"I ha'ena seen a paper for a week. . . . Three-ha'pence! Man, but that's deplorable!"

"M—Maister Ridhorn." Willie looked down again.

"Ay?"

The words came with a rush. "I've got five an' thirty shillin's in the savin's bank, an' ye're awfu' welcome."

It was a sight to see the red fly to the man's face: "Oh, Wullie!" he whispered; and again, "Oh, Wullie, Wullie! . . . A cauld in the heid aye mak's ma eyes that watery."

"Ye'll tak' it?" the boy cried eagerly. "It's no' much, but—

"It's a' ye've got, an' ye offer it to me! Weel, it'll tak' a lot o' affliction to mak' me forget this! Thenk ye, laddie, thenk ye. But thenk the Lord, also, I dinna need yer bit honest savin's."

"Ye dinna need it?" Willie was plainly dismayed. "Are ye—are ye no' burst—ruined?"

"Wha said I was ruined?" exclaimed the painter. "Oh, it's no' as bad as that, an' "—a soft smile lit up the melancholy visage—"in yin respec' I'm a heap richer nor I was aweer." Suddenly he laughed. "I see ye've the paper in yer pooch. I'll tak' a look at Jingoes for the last time."

Willie, still crestfallen, drew the paper from his pocket reluctantly. "It's no' worth yer while

lookin' at it. I mind fine what it says aboot Jingoes. It says Jingoes was strong at three-ha'pence. I marked it wi' a pencil." He held out the paper.

It was snatched from his fingers.

"What! . . . *Strong!*" cried Mr. Redhorn. His eyes found the place. "Criftens! Here, laddie! Quick! I canna see proper. What feegures is these?"

Willie went to his side. "A *'one'* an' a *'half'* —three-ha'-pence."

"Na, na!" It was a shout of glee. "It's one an' a half, richt enough, but it means one an' a half pounds—one pound, ten-thirty shillin's! Jingoes is up!—boomin'!" A succession of sneezes checked his excitement. "I'll sell the morn," he said more calmly. "An' that'll be near five an' twinty pound o' profit unless they gang up furder, an' then it'll be mair. Man, Wullie, is that no' splendid?"

Willie admitted this also, quite gravely.

Mr. Redhorn gave him money and sent him out for lemonade, and the twain caroused until near ten o'clock.

It was not until Willie had gone home that Redhorn discovered that the two following days happened to be holidays on the exchange. A lot might happen in two days, he reflected, somewhat dashed, and he retired to bed considerably

sobered. And when Willie called next day he found his employer disinclined to talk of Jingoes, though by no means steeped in the gloom of the past weeks. For Mr. Redhorn was hugging in secret a treasure not subject to fluctuations in value nor within the influence of any purse on earth.

On the third morning Mr. Redhorn journeyed to Glasgow. His deeds there included the purchasing of a new necktie. (He wore it the following Sunday, and Danks inquired if he had been sober when he bought it. Mr. Redhorn cheerfully confessed that he had been intoxicated "in a sense," a dark saying which Danks did not understand at all.)

He returned home in a painful state of suppressed excitement. He had invited Willie to tea—otherwise it would not have been worth setting the meal on the table. For Mr. Redhorn could not eat a bite, and he used his teacup chiefly for concealing strange involuntary grimaces. He spoke little, and forced himself to look as miserable as possible. Willie began to fear that something had gone wrong in Glasgow.

After tea Mr. Redhorn refused draughts, covered his eyes with his hand, and groaned several times.

"Wullie," he said at last, in a voice not his

own, "was ye in earnest, when—when ye offered me yer money?"

The boy was taken aback, but quickly recovered himself. "For sure," he said.

"Because I—I ha'e need o' it, efter a'," said the painter. "An' I wud rather ye didna ask me ony questions."

Willie got up. "It's lucky this is the nicht the bank's open," he said. "I'll be back in ten meenutes."

"Thenk ye, laddie," said Mr. Redhorn, and let him go without another word.

As the door closed the man bowed his face in his hands.

Willie placed a pound-note, a half-sovereign, and three pieces of silver in his employer's hand.

"Thenk ye, laddie," said the painter once more, and his voice shook.

"Ye're welcome," returned the boy, wondering whether he should go or stay.

"Sit doon, Wullie."

Willie obeyed, wishing he could say something comforting. But that was beyond him. He got as far as "Never heed, Maister Ridhorn," and stuck.

Then the man spoke—in a jumpy sort of voice. "When I got to Glesca the day," he said, "Jingoes had rose above two pound. I got rid o'

mine at fifty pound profit. Here's the fifty pound—or at least a deposit receipt wi' the Bank o' Scotland for the same. Tak' a look at it." He passed the document to his apprentice. "Ye'll observe yer name on it." He rose abruptly and went to the door. "Ye'll maybe find it usefu' some day. But dinna ever try to mak' money the way *it* was made. I'm gaun for a stroll, Wullie. Jist gang hame when it suits ye. We'll ha'e the draughts anither nicht." He stepped out into the darkness. "Guid nicht."

* * * * *

"Fifty pound!" the boy panted softly, running to tell his mother. "Fifty pound!"

"Five an' thirty shillin's," muttered the man, standing by the sea-wall in the silence and privacy of the night, "an' it was a' he had. God, but it's a fortune!"

IX

HIS OLD ENEMY

OF the few passengers to disembark from the yellow-funnelled steamer on a certain fine March evening, Mr. Redhorn was the last. Apart from the fact that he was not a pushful person in any circumstances, he was burdened with two bulky parcels containing rolls of wall-paper purchased that day in the city. Mr. Redhorn was tired. He had a moderate headache, the effect of the city's racket plus a twopenny mutton pie consumed in haste after a seven hours' fast. His feet were very cold—"perishin'," as he would have described them. Altogether he was ready for his carpet slippers, easy-chair and fireside, also a cup of tea and, perchance, a dose of the Elixir.

Therefore he looked none too well pleased when the piermaster, having received his penny, took his arm and, with furtive glances in the direction of the village, drew him into the little office, saying: "I've something to say to ye, Joseph."

"Is't important, Tammas?"

"It's aboot Danks, the fishmonger," the piermaster replied with much solemnity of manner.

"Oh dear me!" sighed Mr. Redhorn wearily. "I'm no' interrested in Danks this evenin'—even if he has been playin' another o' his dirty tricks on me. I'm no' interrested in ony human bein', nor in onything animal, vegetable or mineral, excep' Joseph Ridhorn. I'm ower wearied. So I'll bid ye guid nicht, or adieu—whichever ye prefer."

"Haud on, man!" cried the piermaster, catching him by the sleeve. "I'm gled to hear ye say ye're no' interrested in Peter Danks!" The words were uttered most impressively.

"Eh?" Mr. Redhorn's expression became more alert. "What dae ye mean, Tammas? There's mair in yer remark nor meets the eye."

"I mean exac'ly what I say, an' I hope ye'll tak' it as a frien'ly hint."

Mr. Redhorn stared. "A frien'ly hint?"

"Jist that," said Thomas a trifle impatiently. "Ye're a saft-hearted sort o' chap, Joseph," he went on mildly, "an' although Danks an' you ha'e been enemies as far back as I can mind, if Danks was comin' on ye sudden-like for to borrow a hunderd pound—"

"Tits, man! what are ye talkin' aboot? Danks

borrow a hunderd pound? Ye'll see him ridin' an elephant first!"

"Weel, I can only assure ye that some o' us in Fairport—I needna mention names—ha'e been asked to lend the sum I've mentioned."

"To Peter Danks?" Mr. Redhorn let fall one of his parcels.

"Ay, to Peter Danks. . . . An' I thought I wud jist gi'e ye a hint—"

"But—but Danks is the solidest man in Fairport!"

"So it has been supposed," said the piermaster drily. "Of course, what I'm tellin' ye is confeedential."

"Oh, I'm as secret as the tomb," Mr. Redhorn returned, stroking his nose. "But I'm stupefied. I canna comprehend it, Tammas." Suddenly he peeped through the small window. "See! Thonder's Danks at his door, chattin' wi' his cronies; jist the same as he's been daein' every fine evenin' for twinty year. I'm thinkin' he's been takin' a rise oot o' you an' the others."

Thomas shook his head. "Danks there is daein' his best to keep up appearances. His cronies ken naething aboot his affairs; naebody in Fairport does, excep' you an' me an' twa-three ithers. But the man's in a bad way—desperate for cash. . . . Aweel, I've warned ye, Joseph, an' the subjec' is closed atween us."

"An' I'm obleeged to ye, Tammas, though in a way yer warnin' 's wasted, for Danks wud never come to me—no' if he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Weel, I'll be movin' hame." The painter recovered hold of his parcel, bade his friend goodnight, and left the office.

In order to reach his abode it was necessary to pass by the fish-shop. To all appearances Mr. Danks was swelling with as much importance as ever, and his harsh sneering laugh fell more than once on the painter's ears. Yet, for the first time in many years, Mr. Redhorn was spared the mental exertion of producing a smart retort to his enemy's sarcastic personal ramarks. With a nod to the group of idlers, who were plainly astonished at the fishmonger's silence, he proceeded to his bachelor abode, where to his surprise and gratification, he discovered Willie, his apprentice, in the act of preparing tea.

"Wullie!" he cried, "this is rael kind o' ye."

"I had a message for ye aboot that paper for Miss Grogan's bedroom," the boy replied, "an' I thought I micht as weel come early an' get ready yer tea. An' here"—he took a glass from the mantelpiece—"here's a dose o' the Elixir. I thought ye wud be the better o' it efter yer day in Glesca."

"Upon ma word," said Mr. Redhorn, accepting the dose, though somewhat staggered by his

apprentice's attention, "I'm fair amazed at yer thoughtfulness, laddie. Here's to ye!"

"Oh, that's a' richt," said Willie easily. "It's guid for ye, an' I like fine to see ye makin' faces."

* * * * *

When a full week had elapsed without anything special happening to stimulate the gossips of Fairport, Mr. Redhorn began to doubt the accuracy of the piermaster's estimate of the fishmonger's financial condition, and at the end of three weeks he decided that the Danks panic had been either merely temporary or (which was far more likely) an elaborate piece of "codding" on that sardonic person's part. He had known Danks for many years as the most close-fisted person in the village; he was aware that five years ago Danks had inherited a couple of thousand pounds; moreover, Danks, like himself, was a bachelor without a dependent. The painter was not the sort of man who finds entertainment in prying into and discussing his neighbours' business; indeed, he shrank from revelations of all kinds, but more especially from those of an unhappy nature. So he made no enquiries and let the matter slip from his mind, gladly enough.

On the evening of the first of April Mr. Redhorn sat at his untidy fireside trying to darn a sock. The atmosphere around him was redolent of eucalyptus. He was beginning to recover from what he called his "annual Spring cauld in the heid," which had kept him indoors for the past three days. As he was wont to explain to those who accused him of malingering, there were, doubtless, professions for which a clear head was unnecessary, but the painting trade was not one of them; also, he was not going to risk his reputation as a paper-hanger and decorator by sneezing in the midst of a delicate operation; finally, no other human head had ever been afflicted with such a cold as his—it was unique in the annals of influenza.

Mr. Redhorn regarded the sock in his hand with extreme disfavour. "There'll sune be nane o' the oreeginal left," he muttered. "Darns, darns, darns! Oh, for the moral courage to fling it in the fire!"

He threw it under the table instead and took up a penny novelette with a coloured frontispiece depicting a very dark gentleman about to stab a very fair lady without giving her time to put up her hair. The title was "False yet True."

Mr. Redhorn read steadily for five minutes, and then returned the novelette to the shelf at

the side of the fireplace. "It's no' as guid as usual," he reflected, "or else ma passion for literature is failin'." He sighed heavily.

The truth was, Mr. Redhorn was seriously depressed. No doubt his cold, and perhaps also the sock, had contributed to his gloom, but the primary cause was his apprentice. For Willie had accepted an invitation to draughts and lemonade for seven-thirty prompt, and it was now near to nine o'clock. An hour ago Mr. Redhorn, glancing out of the window, prior to lowering the blind, had observed the boy in earnest conversation with a damsel of about his own age, fifteen, and not lacking in personal charms.

"H'm! I suppose it had to come suner or later," the painter drearily soliloquised, as the little scene now recurred to him. "In the Spring, accordin' to the poet Byron, a young man's fancy turns to thoughts o' love. Aweel, it's better nor bettin' on horses, onyway. An' I dare say it's maybe mair excitin' nor draughts. Ay, youth's a fine thing, an' even auld age has been said to ha'e its beauties. But middle-age, wi' a cauld in the heid an' a tendency to dyspeepsia, no' to mention chilblains, lumpy socks an' nae comp'ny—middle-age, I declare, is— Come in, come in! The door's no' bolted."

Willie entered, panting, his eyes shining.

"Sit doon, laddie," said Mr. Redhorn, with less

cordiality of tone than the apprentice was accustomed to.

"I couldna come ony earlier," Willie gasped, seating himself. "I've been that busy gatherin' news. I've got some rare news for ye."

"I preshume," the painter remarked ironically, "ye ha'e deigned to appear in order to inform me o' yer approachin' nuptials."

"I dinna ken what ye're gassin'—speakin' aboot," returned Willie. "I cam' to tell ye that Danks is burst."

"Eh?—what's that?"

"I'm sayin', Danks is *burst*."

Mr. Redhorn recovered himself. "Tits, laddie! that's an auld canary! Wha has been coddin' ye?" he coolly enquired.

"There's nae coddin' aboot it," was the indignant reply. "It's the solemn truth. It's a' through Fairport. If ye hadna had the cauld in yer nose ye wud ha'e heard aboot it afore noo."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "Na, na, Wullie. Ye've been the victim o' a rumour which is entirely devoid o' foondation. Danks is no' the sort to burst."

"But he *is* burst—as sure as ye're sittin' there," the boy asserted. "I heard it first frae Jessie Forrest, when I was comin' to see ye, an' then I went an' listened to different folk to see what

I could hear. They were a' speakin' aboot Danks. He's been gettin' the lend o' money, an' he canna pay it back, an'—"

"That'll dae, laddie." Mr. Redhorn rose. "I'll return in twa meenutes. Ye'll find a bottle o' leemonade in the press," he said, and hurrying to the door, snatched his cap from a peg and left the house.

The piermaster's abode was almost next door, and the piermaster was at home.

"Ay, it's true," he said in answer to the painter's question. "Ye wouldna believe me afore, Joseph, but I was richt. Danks has been speculatin' in secret for years an' lossin' a' he made at his business an' a heap mair besides. He's been borrowin' frae moneylenders, an' he's had a bill dishonoured. I was tell't the day that his name is in this week's black list—"

"What? The Black List—that vilest publication o' modern ceevilization!"

"The same," said Thomas. "An' I ken for a fac' that if Danks canna produce twa hunderd pound by the morn's mornin', he's a done man. An' he's that already, for wha's gaun to trust him wi' twa hunderd pound? No' me, nor you either, I'm thinkin'!"

A short pause, and Mr. Redhorn enquired: "Ha'e ye seen him the nicht?"

"No' to speak to. I gaed up to the shop wi'

the intention o' speakin', but the door was shut, an' when I keeked through the wee hole in the shutters I seen him sittin' there wi' his heid in his han's—an' so I turned an' cam' awa'. God! I was kin' o' vexed for the man, though I never liked him."

"Sittin' there," said Mr. Redhorn musingly, "surrounded by his faithful but helpless fish—criftens! it's a sad job."

"It is; but he's only got hissel' to blame. He canna expec' us to help him noo. There's naebody in Fairport wi' siller to put in a sinkin' ship."

"True, Tammas, true," the painter slowly admitted. "Weel, I'll awa' back to—"

"He hasna been at you—has he?" suddenly asked the piermaster.

"Na, na. He kens better nor to come to me." And Mr. Redhorn retreated to his own abode.

"Wullie," he said on entering, "I owe ye an apology, for it appears that yer report was only too true." With a sigh he sank into his chair.

Willie stared at him over his tumbler of lemonade. "Are ye no' pleased, Maister Redhorn?"

"Pleased! What for wud I be pleased?"

"The man's burst!"

"Laddie," said Mr. Redhorn, heavily, "the spectacle o' a human bein' feenancially exploded

is mair excruciatin' to ma feelin's than onything in Shakespeare or 'East Lynne'."

"But—but ye hate the man."

"Even hatred has its leemits. Ye wouldna hit a man when he was doon, wud ye, Wullie?"

"Wha said I wud? But I wudna be sorry for him, if I hated him, an' if he had played me dirty tricks."

"An' if ye wudna hit him, what wud ye dae?"

"Let him lie."

Mr. Redhorn sighed and stroked his nose. "Onybody could dae that," he said at last.

Willie regarded his master enquiringly. "What wud you dae?"

"Dear knows. . . . But it maun be an awfu' thing to ha'e to pay in every mortal way—excep' in cash. Ye're ower young to understan' what I mean, Wullie."

"I understan' fine what ye're drivin' at. Ye mean that Danks'll ha'e to gi'e up his shop an' everything. Serves him richt!"

"Come, come, laddie! what has Danks ever done to you?"

"He's tried to mak' mischief atween you an' me. He's—"

"That's true enough. But, ye see, he was annoyed at me for takin' you on as apprentice instead o' his nephew. I daresay he's forgotten a' aboot that by noo."

"He's tried to mak' a cod o' you heaps o' times, Maister Ridhorn."

"I've aye been able to defend masel'. Wi'oot undue immodesty, I think I may say I've aye managed to confound him suner or later. Ye can conseeder us quits, Danks an' me."

"I believe ye're stickin' up for the man!" cried Willie. "I didna think ye was sae saft."

"Aw!" murmured the painter, and fell to stroking his nose again.

"I believe," the boy pursued with sudden conviction, "I believe ye wud try to gi'e Danks a leg up, if ye wasna afraid."

"Afraid! Afraid o' what?" demanded Mr. Redhorn.

The boy hesitated, looking uneasy. "Afraid o' what the folk wud say," he mumbled.

Mr. Redhorn drew a long breath, expelled it, and said: "By Jupiter, ye've hit the nail on the heid!" Putting his hand over his eyes, he lay back in his chair.

The long silence that followed was broken by Willie.

"Maister Ridhorn, I—I didna mean to vex ye."

"Ye didna vex me. . . . But what wud *you* say if I was to try to gi'e Danks a leg up, as ye expressed it?" The painter looked through his fingers at his apprentice.

The latter shook his head and shut his mouth as much as to signify that he was not going to commit himself this time.

"Wud ye say I was daft?"

"N—no' exac'ly."

"Wud ye say I was saft?"

"Something like that."

"I suppose that's what a' the folk wud say?"

Willie nodded reluctantly.

"Oh, criftens!" groaned the painter, "what a terrifyin' thing is public opeenion, an' yet it's no' once a week that it's worth a damn! . . . I beg yer pardon, laddie, for usin' a bad word."

"I'm no' heedin'," said Willie reassuringly. "Maybe it helps ye."

Mr. Redhorn ignored the remark. "Wullie," be bitterly declared, "I'm a poltroon!"

"What's that?"

"A poltroon is a species o' coward."

"Oh, I thought it was a kin' o' beast—a sort o' monkey. But what for are ye callin' yersel' names, Maister Ridhorn."

"Because I ha'ena the moral courage to gi'e Danks a leg up."

"I suppose ye wud never get yer money back."

"That's no' precisely the p'int," said the painter, a trifle shortly.

"Is't no?"

"I dinna mean to suggest that I'm keen on

lossin' money—quite the obverse; but I would raythe loss money nor ha'e folk think I had lost it. Ye see?"

Willie prevented a yawn with a timely gulp of lemonade. "I dinna see the sense in that," he remarked, wiping his lips on his sleeve. "But ye could easy loss money wi'oot folk kennin' onything aboot it."

Mr. Redhorn shook his head. "There's nae secret safe frae the Almighty an' the public of Fairport. Suner or later they wud find oot that I had gi'ed Danks a leg up."

"But ye're no' really gaun to gi'e him a leg up?"

The painter blushed, rose and took a cigarette from a packet on the mantelpiece. He lit it with deliberation.

On recovering from a severe fit of choking and coughing he said: "Wullie, if you was standin' on the pier thonder, an' yer worst enemy fell into the water, wud ye no' throw him a rope? . . . Of course ye wud! If necessary, ye wud even plunge in to the rescue. Ye wud risk yer life—"

"Wud I?"

"We'll say ye wud, for the sake of argument." Mr. Redhorn's tone was a little impatient. "An' then, when ye had saved yer worst enemy, the public wud cry 'hurray!' an' ca' ye a noble char-

acter. . . . *But,* supposin' yer worst enemy was strugglin' in the ocean o' feenancial deeficulties, an' ye threw him yer purse—"

"I never had a purse." There was no stopping the yawn this time. "An' what if it missed him?"

"Oh, me!" cried the painter, "d'ye no' ken a metaphor when ye hear it?" He glanced at the clock. "Tits! it's time ye was awa' hame to yer bed. Yer mither'll be wonderin' what's keepin' ye. Awa' wi' ye!"

"I didna' mean to offend ye," said the boy, rising and laying the empty tumbler on the table.

"Ye didna offend me. . . . But ye're ower young to appreciate ma present painful poseetion, an' so—"

"But—but—"

"Gang!"

Confused and crestfallen, Willie took up his cap and obeyed.

Mr. Redhorn threw the cigarette into the fire and himself into the easy-chair.

"I needna ha'e lost ma temper," he reflected, presently. "I shouldna ha'e expected him to grasp ma physicological (?psychological) observations. I couldna ha'e grasped them masel' at his age. But oh criftens! what am I to dae? Public opeenion. . . ."

A shy tapping at the door startled him. He rose, unsteady and rather pale. Was it Danks come to him as a last desperate resource? He feared yet hoped it was.

But when he had opened the door—behold! Willie once more.

"Wh—what is it, laddie?" he stammered.

"I thought ye wud maybe like to hear aboot Danks."

"What aboot him noo?"

"The lamp was burnin' in the shop, so I had a squint through the hole in the shutter. Danks was sittin' at the counter—"

"Still? . . . What was he daein'? Writin'?"

"Na; he was jist daein' naething."

"What was he lookin' like?"

"I couldna see his face. He had his arms on the coonter, an' his face was doon on them. Maybe he was sleepin'."

"Maybe," said the painter with melancholy irony. "I daresay he's been sleepin' extra soun' recently! . . . Is that a' ye've got to tell me, laddie?"

"Ay; excep' . . . "

"Excep' what?"

"He—he looked queer—as if he had got—wee'er."

"Wee—er! Hoo dae ye mean, Wullie?"

"Weel, I used to think he was a great big man,

an' noo he looks as if he had—jist as if he had got—burst."

"God!" said the painter under his breath, "surely he hasna. . . . Laddie, did ye see him *move?*"

"Whiles he gi'ed a bit jerk."

"The Lord be thankit!" Mr. Redhorn took the puzzled apprentice by the arm. "Come inside for a meenute. I'll apologise to yer mither the morn."

While Willie stood blinking his employer found writing materials and indited the following note—

"Fairport,
April 1.

I can lend you £200 payable back when you can.

J. Redhorn."

"Wullie," he said, softly thumping the flap of the envelope, "ye behold me riskin' ma reputation as a sober man o' business. But for the moment I can honestly declare I dinna care *that*" —he smote the table—"for public opeenion!"

"Ye near upset the ink-pot."

"If I had it wud ha'e made nae difference to ma statement." Mr. Redhorn arose, and placed the letter in the boy's hand. "Carry that to Peter Danks. Chap at the door till he opens. See that he reads the enclosed communication at once. Then report to me."

"Are ye gi'ein' him a leg up, efter a'?"

"March!" commanded the painter.

Left to himself he reseated himself at the table, his head between his hands. The supreme moment of exaltation had passed, yet he did not regret what he had done.

* * * * *

"Ye've been a lang time, laddie."

"It was a lang time afore he opened the door."

"Ye delivered the letter?"

"Ay; I think he thought it was an accoont for pentin'; so I tell't him it wasna."

"An' then?"

"He opened it."

Mr. Redhorn's countenance was working in a curious fashion. "What did he say?" came the question, shakily.

"Naething."

"Naething?"

"He jist made faces an' waved me oot o' the shop."

"Made—faces?"

"Ay," said the boy, awkwardly.

A short pause.

"What sort o' faces, Wullie?"

"Same as you're m—makin'."

"Eh?"

But Willie turned and fled, for he realized that he was making faces, too.

X

AN INTRUSION OF YOUTH

WITH the assistance of a stout walking-stick, Mr. Redhorn hobbled painfully across the floor, and with sundry grunts deposited himself in the easy-chair by the cold hearth. With additional and more forcible grunts he slowly lifted his right leg to the support afforded by a derelict packing-case branded with the name of a famous champagne firm. Having secured comparative ease, he looked up at the clock, muttered: "Efter ten! What keeps the wumman?" and dropped his gaze to the grate full of last night's ashes. He poked the ashes, in the absurd hope that a spark might have survived.

A tap at the door he answered with a curt "Come in!" and presented a decidedly cross countenance for the reception of Mrs. McFadyen, the neighbor to whom, for twenty years, he had paid a weekly sum for services which she described as "cleanin', tidyin', an' reddin' up generally."

But it was not Mrs. McFadyen who entered.

Over the threshold stepped briskly a girl of fifteen or thereabouts. She wore a pink blouse, faded but fresh-looking, and an apron of sackcloth covering her short, dark skirt. Her abundant black hair was tied with a scrap of pink ribbon in a trim pigtail. She possessed a prettily browned complexion, and she carried herself with the confidence of a reigning beauty.

"Guid mornin'!" she said calmly, and closed the door.

"Mornin'!" replied the painter. "If it's a job I'm wanted for, I'm sorry I'm no' able. Wha sent ye, lassie?"

"Mistress McFadyen—at least, she didna exac'ly send me, but she said I could come if I liked. I'm Agnes Fraser."

"I ken wha ye are weel enough. But what's up wi' Mistress McFadyen?"

"She's awa' to Glesca." The girl moved forward. "Ha'e ye no' had ony breakfast?" she inquired, nodding her head at the fireplace.

"I was waitin' fer her. As ye see, I'm kin' o' helpless. Fell off a ladder yesterday. Micht ha'e had mair sense at ma time o' life. The doctor says—"

"Ay, I ken aboot that. But first I'll get the fire started, an' then I'll explain aboot Mistress McFadyen. Where dae ye keep the sticks?" She was rolling up her sleeves as she spoke.

Mr. Redhorn told her.

"But I want to ken hoo ye happen to be here," he began.

"Patience, patience," she returned mildly, and went to work.

It was not until she had got the fire going and the kettle in position that she explained her presence, and she did so while washing her hands at the sink.

"Mistress McFadyen got word this mornin' that an auld auntie o' hers in Glesca was badly—no' expected to recover, an' so on."

"I'm vexed to hear that," the painter remarked, with that very human sympathy which comes none the less freely along with a sense of personal comfort.

"Oh, ye needna be vexed for her! She's expectin' to be left a heap o' siller—fully a thoosan' pound. I happened to be on the pier when she was waitin' for the boat, an' I seen she was terrible excited. It was easy seen she had forgot aboot everything else but the siller. So jist when the boat was comin' to the pier, I gangs up to her an' says, says I: 'What aboot the penter an' his game leg?' Ye should ha'e seen her face then, Maister Ridhorn!

"'Mercy me!' she cried, 'if I ha'ena been an' clean forgot a' aboot him! Weel, he'll jist ha'e to manage for hissel'.'

"I thought she had a queer neck on her to speak that way efter a' the cash she's had oot o' you, so I says to her, says I: 'If ye'll excuse *me,* Mistress McFadyen, for speakin' ma mind, ye micht ha'e had the decency to get somebody to tak' yer place, for it's no' fair to leave an' auld man wi' a game leg to fend for hissel', espaycially as—'"

"I'm no' that auld, lassie," Mr. Redhorn interrupted with some irritation.

"Tits, man! I was jist rubbin' it in to mak' her feel uncomfortable. Of course ye're no' an auld man really, though ye're nae chicken, either." Having dried her hands, Agnes made an assault on a cupboard. "The fire'll no' mak' toast for ages. Wud ye like me to rin oot for rolls, or will breid an' butter an' a biled egg content ye?"

"That'll dae fine, lassie."

"Ma name's Agnes, whiles Aggie. Please yersel'. It's time ye had a clean table-cloth."

Mr. Redhorn blushed.

"There's a clean yin some place, but—oh, never heed it the noo. What did Mistress McFadyen say?"

"She tell't me to mind ma ain business. Oh, she was gey angry. But I tell't her to keep her hair on, an' asked her if she wud gi'e me the job. At that she looked roun' to see if there was

naebody else she could gi'e the job to, but seemin'ly there wasna, an' by this time the boat was at the pier. So she said, sulky-like, that I could dae the work if I wanted, an' she wud pay me hauf what she got frae you. I was that angry that when she was crossin' the gangway, I cried efter her: 'Yer money perish with ye!'—which was the text last Sabbath. Some o' the folk laughed, an' she got a rid face, but the boat started afore she was ready wi' ony back-chat, an'—weel, that's ma story ended! Dae ye like yer egg saft or hard, Maister Ridhorn?"

"Saft. . . . I'm sure I'm greatly obleeged to ye for thinkin' aboot me in ma helpless condeetion, A—Agnes," Mr. Redhorn said diffidently, "but I could wish ye hadna been sae severe on Mistress McFadyen, though I confess she had a fair impiddence to offer ye but hauf her—her salary. But I'll put that richt for ye."

"Maister Ridhorn!"

"Eh? What is it, lassie—I mean Agnes?"

"I didna come here for money." This was uttered with the utmost haughtiness of tone and manner. "Besides"—with a sudden descent to mildness—"ma brither said, if I took money frae you, he wud break ma neck."

"Yer brither? What has he to dae wi' it?"

"Ma brither Peter. It was him ye got the job in the ileworks in Glesca. He's hame for his holiday."

"But bless me, that was naething to dae for the lad. He was welcome," said Mr. Redhorn, who was always sadly embarrassed by anything suggestive of gratitude. "Did ye consult yer fayther aboot comin' here?"

Agnes, cutting bread, nodded.

"And what did he say?"

"Said I was to dae ma best for ye, an' behave masel'. Hoo mony slices can ye shift?"

"Aw, a slice'll dae," said Mr. Redhorn, with a glance at the slab now being buttered. "I'm no' extra hungry this mornin'. I—I'm feelin' kin' o' overwhelmed wi' yer kindness. If ma apprentice, Wullie, hadna been awa' for his holiday, I dare say he wud ha'e been helpin' me."

"I dare say he wud try, but I wud like to see *his* notion o' puttin' a hoose in order."

"But *you're* no' gaun to dae that? The place can stan' till Mistress McFadyen comes back. It's no' what ye micht term the acme o' tidiness —it never is; but at ma time o' life a man canna be ower parteec'lar—espaycially when he's a bachelor."

With a swift survey of the room, Agnes said: "I wonder hoo ye can thole it."

"Thole what, A—Agnes?"

"Dae ye like yer tea strong?"

"Jist middlin'. But what—"

"Oh, we'll no' speak aboot disagreeables till ye've had yer breakfast."

Presently she brought the table to his side, and proceeded to serve the modest meal.

"Does Mistress McFadyen cook for ye?" she inquired.

"Na, na; I've aye done that for masel'. She made me a cup o' tea last nicht, efter the doctor had left me, but that was the first time. I manage fine masel', as a rule."

"I'm thinkin' it's an awfu' life ye lead," remarked Agnes. "I never could understan' what a girl wants to get married for, but I see noo what mak's a man keen on it. Dae ye live on tinned things?"

"No' exclusively," replied Mr. Redhorn; "but I confess tinned things is handy for a man in ma poseetion. My! ye've made this egg rale nice, A—Agnes! I ha'ena tasted as nice a egg since ma mither biled me yin, thirty year back."

After a glance of suspicion, Agnes permitted herself to look gratified.

"I wonder what ye wud like for yer dinner?" she said tentatively. "I can cook onything as long as it's no' ower fancy."

"A chop?" suggested the painter, off his guard. Within the moment, however, he was protesting that he could not allow her to do anything further for him.

She listened patiently, cheerfully, as a mother might listen to a child's serious nonsense, and said:

"It'll be costin' ye something, that leg o' yours."

"'Deed is it! It'll cost me a fortnight's trade," he returned ruefully.

"An' if ye dinna rest it, it'll cost ye mair. Eh?"

"Ay; the doctor says it's got to be rested."

"So ye're no' likely to jump up an' chase me wi' yer big stick?"

For the first time that morning Mr. Redhorn smiled.

"That's no' an operation I'm likely to execute in the meantime."

"Then I'm safe," she smiled back. "Mair tea?"

"Thenk ye. I ha'ena had tea like this since—"

"Aw whisht, Maister Ridhorn!" She laughed and changed the subject. "Is there ony meddicine ye've got to tak for yer leg?"

He hesitated.

"No' exac'ly for ma leg. But, if ye've nae objections, I could dae wi' a dose frae that bottle on the mantelpiece."

"'Dyspepsia Elixir,'" said Agnes, reading the label.

"Jist that. I—I usually tak' it as an antidote efter I've enjoyed an egg. Ye see, I like eggs better nor eggs like me."

"I see," said the girl solemnly.

Later she administered the dose, gravely re-

marking: "I suppose, Maister Ridhorn, ye ha'ena tasted sich nice meddicine since yer mither gi'ed ye a dose, fifty year back."

"Ye're a treat, lassie!" he cried, quaking until a twinge of his leg changed the chuckle to a groan.

After she had cleared the table and washed up, and made him as comfortable as she could with the means at command, she went out to do the necessary marketing, while Mr. Redhorn smoked a cigarette of the worst possible quality and meditated on the pleasantness that had so unexpectedly befallen him.

"My, but youth's a bonny thing," he said to himself. "There's something aboot a young female's kindness that's different frae a' ither human kindnesses. 'Deed, it's worth ha'ein a game leg for—nearly."

On her return Agnes proceeded to tidy up, which is a mild way of putting it, since she began with a general upheaval.

"Here, stop it!" exclaimed the painter. "I canna let ye kill yersel'. It's no' the Spring, onyway!"

"It hasna been the Spring in this hoose for mony a year," she retorted. "When was the floor scrubbed last?"

"Dear knows. Ye see, I'm aye at my work when Mistress McFadyen comes."

"It's mair nor she is," muttered Agnes. "It's ower late to begin noo, but I'll get it scrubbed first thing the morn's mornin'."

"Ye'll dae naething o' the sort!"

"Weel, weel," she said soothingly, advancing to the hearth, "we'll no' speak aboot it the noo." From the mantelshelf she began to remove the articles which had their places there—a small tea-caddy, two damaged china ornaments, a packet of cigarettes, the Elixir, and so forth. "There's an inch o' dirt here," she declared with a grimace. "I wonder when Mistress McFadyen cleaned it? No' this year, I'll be boun'!" She turned to the invalid. "What dae ye say to gi'ein' her the sack when she comes back?"

Mr. Redhorn sighed. In his heart he knew that he had been wanting to give her the sack these nineteen years. But now he shook his head.

"I doobt I couldna dae that. Ye see, she's a widow—"

"It's nae wonder she's that! Killed her man wi' dirt, I suppose."

"Whisht, lassie—Agnes," the painter said reprovingly, with a cough to cover the chuckle. "Besides, I've a notion that she needs her salary, sich as it is."

"But if her auld auntie leaves her a thoosan' pound—Eh?"

"Criftens!" exclaimed Mr. Redhorn. "That's a happy thought! At least it alters the complexion o' the seetuation generally. If she was inheritin' a sum like that, she wudna be wantin' to keep her job here. In which case—" He halted; his animation departed as suddenly as it had come. He glanced up at Agnes, but she was apparently absorbed in contemplating the dirt on the mantelshelf.

Presently Agnes glanced down at him, but he was staring gloomily at the fire. She gave a tiny cough; he looked up. Their eyes met for the fraction of a second. Then Mr. Redhorn averted his hastily, as one who harbours a guilty secret.

Agnes went over to the sink and returned with a wet cloth. To do her justice, she had entered the painter's abode that morning without a single ulterior motive. On the impulse she had determined to do the man who had helped her brother a kindly turn—simply that and nothing more. And she had started the good work with admirable singleness of mind. But, somehow, within an hour complications set in. Agnes was one of a large family, and she had three elder sisters. There was practically nothing for her to do at home; there was no opening for a young girl in Fairport, and it would be years before her parents would consent to her taking a situa-

tion in the city. In the circumstances, the post at present held by Mrs. McFadyen began to appear desirable.

"I never seen sich a muck," she said, exhibiting the cloth, to which a black paste adhered. "Did you?"

Reluctantly Mr. Redhorn examined it. "It seems as if she had overlooked the mantlepiece," he slowly remarked, swaying betwixt inclination and loyalty. "She's no' as young as she was, puir body," he added, with an effort. "Was it a thoosan' pound, ye said she was expectin' frae her expirin' relative?"

"No' a penny less."

Mr. Redhorn stroked his nose and smoothed his hair ere he suggested the possibility of the old lady's recovery.

Agnes made it plain that she could offer no hope.

"The message said she was sinkin' fast; an', onyway, Mistress McFadyen wudna ha'e gaed to Glesca on chance—twa shillin's an seevenpence return, forbye tuppence for the pier. This dirt maun be terrible bad for yer health, Maister Ridhorn."

The painter did not respond, and Agnes had the wit to refrain from further discussion of the subect now nearest her heart, and to apply all her energies to her domestic labours. Being no

politician, she probably reflected that, after all, her actions might speak louder than her words.

* * * * *

During the ensuing three days it would have been hard to say which of the two anticipated the arrival of the steamer with keener anxiety, or which learned of the non-arrival of Mrs. McFadyen with more heart-felt feelings of relief.

On the evening of the third day Agnes, coming in to prepare the patient's supper—Mr. Redhorn, by the way, now failed to remember tastier suppers even from the hands of his mother—brought tidings. Miss Dewar, the local dressmaker, had received from the absent one a picture postcard showing Glasgow's Municipal Buildings and bearing the pencilled words "Sinking rapidly."

"That means she'll no' be back this week," Agnes said cheerfully. "Will ye tak' yer meddicine afore or efter yer supper?"

"Neither!" replied the painter, afraid (quite unnecessarily) of looking as happy as he felt. "It's fair supernatural the way yer cookin' agrees wi' me, Agnes! An' it's that toothsome!"

The girl's gratification betrayed itself in a small giggle.

"Ye're lookin' nane the waur o' it, onyway. An' ye've got a corkin' appetite."

"A gladiator couldna ha'e better."

While she prepared the meal (strictly in accordance with instructions supplied by her eldest sister) Mr. Redhorn once more surveyed his abode. Never before had it appeared so clean and sweet, so homely and comfortable. Indeed, it seemed to lack nothing but fresh paint, and Agnes and he had already decided upon the colours to be applied as soon as health and time permitted.

Undoubtedly the girl had worked hard, yet she had done so without making any elaborate display of her capabilities. Mr. Redhorn no longer remonstrated with her; he frankly enjoyed her company, and spent most of her periods of absence in wondering what he could buy for her when he should be fit to travel to the city. Moreover, he was not allowed to weary in the evenings, for Agnes's father or brother dropped in with the village news, and also with friendly tokens in the shape of newly baked scones and freshly churned butter. Other neighbours, too, paid him little friendly attentions, and altogether he was beginning to enjoy what he termed "the sweets o' popularity."

Nevertheless, he would fain have had only the girl's company. When he came to realize quite clearly that she was deliberately seeking to oust Mrs. McFadyen from favour, he permitted the knowledge to become a satisfaction to his soul

and sought to ignore the intermittent tweaks of conscience. It would be difficult to express in so many words the state of mind of Joseph Redhorn in these days; he could not have done so for himself; but undoubtedly he was indulging in a flirtation with Youth in the abstract and struggling to be faithful to Age in the actual, at one and the same time. Agnes, with her warmth of kindliness, her glints of sentiment, her transparent plottings, her sparklings of humour, her bright impertinences, and her burning enthusiasm for orderliness, was an experience as refreshing as it was new to Joseph. She had freed more than his home from staleness.

On the Sunday evening, while tidying up preparatory to going home, Agnes, who had managed all day to avoid reference to Mrs. McFadyen, said casually:

"I wonder hoo she's gettin' on?"

"Wha?" inquired the painter, with an ill-feigned lack of comprehension.

"Her."

"Her? . . . Dae ye mean Mistress McFadyen, Agnes?"

"Ay. . . . Were *you* no' wonderin' aboot her?"

Mr. Redhorn *could* tell a lie, but not to save his own face. "By a curious coincidence," he confessed, "I was."

There was a pause, and the girl said in lowered tones:

"Dae ye think the auld auntie'll ha'e sunk yet?"

"Agnes," he returned, "it wud be mair respectful to use the word 'departed.'"

"Sorry. . . . I'm sure it'll be a' the same to her, puir auld thing. I hope Mistress McFadyen was nice to her."

"Aw, I think we can gi'e her credit for that."

Agnes gave a slight sniff. "Maister Ridhorn," she began, and halted.

"What is it, Agnes?"

"Maister Ridhorn, what'll ye dae if she doesna want to serve ye again?"

"I'm wonderin' what I'll dae if she does!" the painter exclaimed. Then hurriedly: "Na, na; I didn't mean that, lassie. It wasna a fair thing to say."

Agnes's flush of delight died away. She turned her back to him and proceeded to put the dishes in the cupboard. "I—I suppose there wud be nae chance for me?" she said in little more than a whisper.

Mr. Redhorn writhed. "What can I say, Agnes?" he muttered. "What can I say?"

"Maybe ye think I'm ower young."

"Na, na. That's the glorious thing aboot ye. But—but—oh dear me, there's nae use speakin' aboot it till we ken mair nor we dae."

Agnes sighed as she closed the cupboard. "Aweel, it's time I was gettin' hame." With a look of scarcely veiled reproach she moved towards the door.

"I didna mean to offend ye, ma dear," he cried.

"Oh, I'm no' offended. Guid nicht, Maister Ridhorn! See ye in the mornin'. Ham an' eggs, I suppose?"

"Agnes, come here an' shake han's, seein' it's the Sabbath nicht."

She came back, recovered from her fit of despondency, smiling in her usual friendly way. "I wasna offended, really. But—ye'll gi'e me the chance, if ye can, eh?"

"Guid kens, I will. Mind, Agnes, whatever happens, I'm grateful. The Lord bless ye! Guid nicht!"

"Guid nicht, Maister Ridhorn! I'll be doon at nine sharp. I—I hope she'll no' come back till ye're quite better, onyway."

The door closed behind her.

"My, but youth's a bonny thing!" he murmured.

* * * * *

It was a little before nine when the knock came.

"Come in!" he cried blithely.

And Mrs. McFadyen entered.

With an almost sick feeling Mr. Redhorn

gazed at the drab and withered creature. "Yer aunt?" he stammered.

"Oh, ma aunt had an operation on Friday, an' noo she's gettin' better. The doctor says she's guid for ten year yet." The statement was delivered without enthusiasm.

Mr. Redhorn pulled his wits together. "I'm gled to hear it," he said, with all the politeness at his command.

"I dare say ye are! It cost me three shillin's a' but a penny." Mrs. McFadyen, who had been peering about the apartment, now produced a series of noisy sniffs. "There's a queer smell here!" she remarked at last, aggressively.

"Ye mean a fragrance, maybe," he suggested. "In ither words, a fresh an' pleasin' odour."

"Weel, I've smelt worse," she admitted, wondering, poor woman, whether she might venture to ask forthwith for her last week's wages, also how much extra she might demand for cooking his meals during the current week. "Ay, I've smelt worse," she repeated, almost graciously.

"Wud ye say it was the fragrance o' soap, Mistress McFadyen?"

"*Soap?*"

"Or—Youth?"

At that Mrs. McFadyen faced the painter and simply gaped.

"Youth," repeated Mr. Redhorn, with a feeble grin. "Ye ken what that is."

She took a stride forward, and peered into his face.

"I thought it was yer leg that was hurt," she said, and touched her forehead suggestively.

The door opened. Agnes, in her rough apron, stood on the threshold.

"Hullo!" she exclaimed, with a poor attempt at lightness. "Ye've got back. Is yer aunt no' deid?"

Understanding came to Mrs. McFadyen. She wheeled round.

"Ay, I've got back," she snapped. "What dae ye want?"

The eyes of Agnes sought the painter's in appeal. The helpless man shrank in his chair.

"What dae ye want, girl?" the woman repeated.

Agnes nerved herself.

"It's time Maister Ridhorn was gettin' his breakfast," she said.

"I'll attend to that."

"Ye dinna ken what he's to get for his breakfast."

"That's enough," cried the woman in a fury. "Awa' hame wi' ye! Ye've nae business here!"

"Whisht, whisht!" the painter whispered distractedly.

"She's nae business here!" Mrs. McFayden stamped her foot. "D'ye hear me, Agnes Fraser? Gang!"

Agnes wavered, but held her ground.

"I'll thenk ye for ma money," she said.

"What money?"

"The money ye promised me for daein' yer work."

"I never promised ye. . . . Weel, weel, ye'll get yer money in guid time."

Agnes expressed her doubts by a toss of her head, accompanied by a sniff, and made a remark in which "pigsty" was the most audible word.

"*What?*" Mrs. McFadyen advanced upon the girl.

"For ony favour—" began Mr. Redhorn, making an effort to rise.

"Ye'll hurt yer ankle," the girl called. "Never heed her. She'll no' touch me twice."

Mrs. McFadyen hesitated; she was almost dancing.

"Will ye gang?" she screeched.

Agnes deliberately folded her slim arms across her young bosom, and said:

"I'll gang—when Maister Ridhorn tells me to gang."

"Oh, criftens!" gasped the painter, falling back in his chair.

A palpitating silence ensued. It lasted until the woman, with a wail, said:

"Bid her gang, Maister Ridhorn, bid her gang!"

"Bid *her* gang, Maister Ridhorn," said Agnes, with a sob. "She canna keep yer hoose nice."

"I've kep' it for twinty year," said Mrs. McFadyen, dread getting the better of resentment. "There's no' a place in Fairport was better kep'—"

"In dirt!"

"Peace, lassie," said Mr. Redhorn, at his wits' end.

"Dae ye want me to gang?" she asked reproachfully. "Ye maun be starvin' for yer breakfast. Look at *her!* She would let ye starve. She deserves to get the sack!"

At these words all the woman's fury came back. A torrent of bitter invective poured from her lips.

Mr. Redhorn shuddered. He held up his hand to stay the girl's retort.

"Agnes," he said sadly, "I think ye best retire."

"Gang? . . . Oh, Maister Ridhorn!"

Mrs. McFadyen emitted a cackle of triumph—which was a mistake on her part.

"An' return in five meenutes," the painter added.

Agnes gave him one look, and went out.

What happened during the next five minutes has never been explicitly disclosed by either party. All that need be known, however, is that Mrs. McFayden calls on Mr. Redhorn every

Saturday morning to receive certain pieces of silver for which she has done no apparent work.

* * * * *

"Noo for the ham an' eggs!" cried Agnes, as soon as she had recovered from the good news, and had absorbed the mild warning to the effect that Mrs. McFadyen was not to be considered an object for derision.

"Ham an' eggs," sighed the painter. "In the meantime I'll be obleeged if ye'll pass me doon the Elixir."

"Are ye feelin' no' weel?" she exclaimed anxiously.

"I'm sufferin' frae what the novelles ca' a revulsion o' feelin'."

Her look of horror passed at his kindly smile.

"I think," she said cheerfully, "you an' me's gaun to be fairly happy—eh?"

"I confess to a similar forebodin'," he replied.

While she got busy, he thoughtfully regarded his glass of physic.

"Youth's a bonny thing," he murmured, "but I'm afraid it's an expensive luxury—espaycially when it's female. Still"—he gulped the dose and pulled a face—"I wudna wonder if it's worth the money."

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